

PLAIN SERMONS,

BY

CONTRIBUTORS

TO THE

“TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.”

---

“ We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

“ For we are glad when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.” 2 Cor. xiii. 8, 9.

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VOL. II.

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NEW EDITION.

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LONDON:

FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,  
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE.

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## S E R M O N    X X X V I I .

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### THINGS TEMPORAL AND THINGS ETERNAL.

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2 COR. iv. 18.

“ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

THERE is a truth which we all know equally well,—whether we are learned or ignorant, old or young ; we are all equally well assured of the truth,—that the things which we see are temporal,—only for a time, and fast passing away.

And yet, though we know it so well, our heavenly FATHER seems, if I may so speak, to take great pains to remind us of it, constantly ; as if it were of very great consequence that we should be continually thinking of it, and as if we were very likely, practically, to forget it.

For in every thing about us, and in ourselves, and in Scripture, the ALMIGHTHY seems to be continually forcing this truth upon our minds.

In every thing about us,—for what are day and night so quickly following each other, but little images of life and of death, and of resurrection after death ? “ There is neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them ; one day telleth another, and one night certifieth another.” And what are Spring and Autumn, Summer and Winter, so quietly indeed and steadily, but so rapidly, succeeding each other ? Decay and death always fol-

lowing very soon upon the steps of every thing whatever, that is allowed to flourish. Doubtless they are intended to make us take this truth of our fleeting, perishable condition seriously to heart.

Again, the lives of other animals, especially those that most fall under our notice, are ordained mostly to be shorter than man's; as if to remind their short-lived master, that he must not depend upon them, for that they must be gone, and that he must get ready to follow them.

Again, as to the lives of our fellow creatures; the ALMIGHTY has so in His wisdom appointed it, that they should all be quietly dropping off, one after the other, of all ages, and of all bodily conditions of health and strength, and in all kinds of ways; and not only this, but HE has so wonderfully arranged it, that there is no person without a constant warning,—no person who has not at all times the case of some death fresh before his eyes. For is there any time when we have not the death of some person, a relation, or a friend, or a neighbour, or of some public person who stood in our mind's eye—the death of some one or other—always before us?

This we cannot suppose to happen without an especial design of God to ourselves,—a gracious warning that we should consider.

In the next place, in the changes and signs of mortality, which we cannot but see in our friends, and feel in ourselves gradually coming on, we hear the same voice of our heavenly FATHER distinctly speaking to us.

And not only in our bodies, but in our minds also, there is the same gradual change; our strongest affections for all earthly objects languish and alter; what we most covet in childhood we care nothing for in manhood, the desires we had in manhood are given up for others when we grow old. Religious feelings also, the highest confidence, the lowest depression of mind, pass away—and leave no trace behind. But here there is one thing very much to be remarked,—though all things without in the world, and though our bodies and every thing that belongs to them, so soon change, and fade away, and are as if they never had been; yet with regard to the mind and the soul, although feelings pass away, yet there are some things that do not change, but always continue with us.

Any thing that a man has done, for good or evil, abides with him all his life.

If he has done what is very sinful when young, it is upon his mind through all ages of life, and even at his death-bed : probably on his sorrowful memory, but if not, a still deeper stain on his conscience.

If he has ever endeavoured earnestly to seek God's favour, this remains on his heart, refreshing his thoughts, and turning them more and more to God all his days.

But to return. All these changes in us and about us are the voice of God ; and when HE speaks, infinitely important is it, that we should listen to His voice : but there is another way in which HE speaks to us more distinctly than this, i. e. by the Bible.

For although this truth, of the fleeting nature of our lives, seems so obvious, that every one thinks he has no need to be told of it ; yet it is very remarkable how the whole of the Scripture seems as it were to be sounding it in our ears throughout.

Upon this subject, indeed, it appears as if nothing could be so touching, so affecting, which would so come home to our hearts, as if a person were to collect together all those passages scattered through the Holy Volume, which, through the voices of the aged Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Apostles, speak of the exceeding transitory and fleeting nature of our pilgrimage here upon earth.

Many of those, particularly such as occur in the Psalms and the book of Job, and of Ecclesiastes, and some in the New Testament, are such as will be obvious to any one on a little consideration : such as,

“ I am a stranger and sojourner before THEE, as all my fathers were.”

“ When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return.”

“ All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.”

“ Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down : he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.”

“ My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle.” “ O remember

that my life is wind." "The eye of him that saw me shall see me no more. Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not."

And through the ninetyeth Psalm, written by the holy Moses, "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past; and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as with a flood—they are as a sleep—in the morning they are like grass, which groweth up; in the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withered."

"We spend our years as a tale that is told."

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

"Let us therefore go forth to JESUS without the camp, bearing His reproach, for here we have no continuing city."

Now, expressions like these, out of number, which occur in Holy Writ, are doubtless addressed to us by the good SPIRIT, as of a fact which it is most necessary we should remember, and which we are most prone practically to forget.

And not by such admonitions only,—but by all its instructive Histories also would the same blessed SPIRIT seem to inculcate upon us an abiding sense of our poor, frail, fading condition here.

Not to mention so many patriarchs, and prophets, and kings, who seem rapidly to be passing before us, and to cry aloud as they pass, We are but strangers and pilgrims, and seeking for another home;—but how many are there of whom it is only recorded, that they lived and died?

Indeed, the fact is, though strange it may appear to say so—we that are alive live more among the dead than we do among the living. When we read a book, and think of the person who wrote it, as of a friend, and ask for him, it is very likely we shall find that he is now among the dead, and not among the living. When we talk of acquaintances and others, how often do we find, as it were accidentally, that they are now among the dead, and not among the living! And, indeed, with all persons who have lived any time in this world, and who are at all given to reflection, their affections and their thoughts are more among the dead than among the living; their best treasures are among them. Did I call them the dead, and ourselves the living? It is so we use the terms, but the fact is, that many of them may be much more alive and truly living than we are,—living in blessed hope

and peace, and released from the death of sin; and are very likely more near to us—and more alive to what we do, than those whom we consider to be living.

Now, though all things in nature, and in Scripture, thus conspire to cry aloud to us, that things here are but temporal, it is obviously the very last thing that people ever consider as true, or pay any serious adequate regard to; but are so taken up with things temporal and seen, as if they would never have an end: and therefore it is, their minds being thus occupied, that they do not generally see the force of these expressions until they look back upon life, and are upon their death-beds: then, indeed, it appears in its true colours, but not till then: then, indeed, it appears as a dream when one awaketh, so quickly passed away.

And now, with regard to the latter part of the subject, that the things which are not seen, are eternal.

It is true that nature does not declare this truth to us as it does the other; but when God has made every thing to preach aloud to us such warnings, about every thing here slipping away from under our feet, we might conclude that there was something behind—something coming on, which was of great consequence.

And this great truth is one which the Old Testament does not declare to us as it does the other, which it so constantly presses upon us; but this it leaves; and this was perhaps one of the things which Moses alludes to when he says, that there are “secret things which belong unto God.”

And this silence of the earlier Scriptures is very remarkable on the subject of everlasting happiness, and everlasting misery.

For it would seem as if this was so awful a truth, when considered, as every truth ought to be considered which comes from God, that perhaps good people might have been overwhelmed at the thought of it.

And therefore, perhaps, it was that the ALMIGHTY, in his wisdom and mercy, has thought proper not to urge this distinctly upon us, until JESUS CHRIST came and showed us His exceeding goodness and compassion towards us, and the great sacrifice and propitiation HE was to make for us. Then it was that HE ventured, as it were, to lift up the veil, and to show us everlasting Heaven and everlasting Hell, into one of which we are all so fast dropping one after the other!

Now what eternity is—what it is to live a life for ever and ever—without any end or prospect of change, of this we can have no idea in this life. For very likely any thing like an adequate conception of such a state, either for good or for evil, would be to us so overpowering that it would at once separate the soul from the body, even to think of it.

All that we can do is to liken it, and compare it with things temporal.

For instance, we can very well imagine what it might be to live for a thousand, or for ten thousand years, and then to imagine that we have ten thousand years again to live; and then to look back from this state and to think what were thirty or seventy years! This will give us *some* notion of the difference between the things which are temporal, and those which are eternal: but still it is only a faint notion: for what are ten thousand years to eternity? they are but a grain of dust on the balance.

Or again, what it will be to wake from the grave, and to find ourselves in one of these states, for good or for evil, this must be a thought of the greatness of which we can have no adequate conception.

But we may form some faint idea of it from things temporal. For a sailor to find after a very dangerous voyage that he is indeed safe upon shore—or for a soldier to find that the battle is over and that he is safe—for persons to find after a state of very great danger, such as being in the midst of a terrible plague or pestilence, and to hear of a sudden that it has gone by, and to find that they are safe: we may tell what their feelings are, and this may give us some idea of what it will be to wake in eternity, and to find that we are safe, that we shall never again be separated from **JESUS CHRIST**.

Again, the true value of things temporal as they will appear to us in eternity—of the true importance of those things which we now consider of so much consequence, that we make no scruple to sacrifice our religion for them—such as wealth and the indulgences it affords, or the cares of acquiring it, both of which are commonly such as to exclude and shut out all serious thoughts of eternity,—or unlawful and sensual pleasures of various kinds, or seditious and disloyal thoughts in political matters, on which the heart is set till it thinks them of the very greatest moment:

all these things, for which religion is sacrificed so commonly that we think nothing of it,—these will appear in eternity in their true colours and importance. How trivial they will then appear, we cannot now tell.

But we may gain some slight notion from what we find in things temporal.

If a man could recal the objects which occupied his mind when a child, and which when a child appeared to him of the greatest consequence, and such as to have occasioned very much real distress or joy at the time, they appear to him now the most absurd trifles.

Or if he was to see a place where he was used to be when a child, which he has not seen since, and which he then thought very large, every thing there appears to him very small and insignificant. And the reason is because his own mind has opened and grown.

But the earthly objects which now occupy his mind as a man, and with regard to which he acts as if he thought them of the very greatest importance, these will appear to him infinitely more trifling and insignificant, when he looks back upon them from the shore of eternity, and his heart opens to know what God is.

If all this be indeed the case, and things present are of such trivial importance and so short lived and unreal, and the things which are not seen so real, so substantial, so momentous ;—how earnestly, how constantly ought we to labour, so to act now as we shall then wish we had done !

For, although all things else are of so little, so very little real importance, yet what we do each day for good or for evil is of the very greatest, for that will affect our condition through the whole of that eternity.

May the ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, by adding to our lives, continues to call us each day to repentance, grant that we may seriously, and in time, prepare ourselves for another life ! May HE open our eyes, that we may see and turn from our manifold sins and failings before the day of grace is past, and the night cometh when no man can work ; for there is no repentance in the grave whither we all are going ! May HE awaken us to a deep sense of the eternal things which are fast coming upon us all, so that we may make haste to make our peace with HIM, through JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD !

## SERMON XXXVIII.

### SUDDEN DEATH.

ST. MATT. xxiv. 44.

“ Therefore be ye also ready ; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.”

It is very difficult to persuade persons to consider how very liable we all are at all times to sudden death.

For notwithstanding any thing that may be urged on this subject, and the frequent instances of it, that occur among us ; yet no person will be induced to believe that he himself is liable to it, so as to live under a practical sense of such a consideration : but each person will, notwithstanding, persuade himself that it will not be so in his case.

He does not see why he should not live as long as others, who are older than himself ; and therefore he persuades himself that he shall. And however many there are who die around us of all ages ;—yet there are also many who continue to live, and some of them older than ourselves.

And if we are induced at any time seriously to reflect on this very frail and uncertain condition of our lives, yet every day that is added to our lives, takes away more and more of this apprehension : so that if any one feels strongly his liability to, and the nearness of, death to-day, he is the more callous to-morrow, because it does not come to him. For *until death does really come, it will always appear long in coming ; but whenever it does come, it will seem doubtless quick and sudden, beyond all conception.*



For these reasons it might be thought by some, that it is not so advisable to warn people of the danger of sudden death, so much as to take them at their own imaginations, and to remind them, that if they live to threescore and ten years, as they think they shall,—yet even then that the time is exceedingly short to prepare for those great and awful changes which are approaching. That even seventy years are as nothing, when compared to Eternity : and that the longest life, when a man comes to look back upon it on his death-bed, appears indeed exceeding short.

Now in all this there is much truth ; but yet is it not the case that Holy Scripture takes pains, as it were, to set before us, not only the vanity and the shortness of the life of man, even at the longest,—and the little value of things temporal, compared with things eternal,—but also the uncertainty of life, and *the frequent suddenness* of death? For instance, in the Old Testament the many examples of the sudden vengeance of God overtaking the wicked, as in the case of Sodom ; and in the New, in the account of the rich man, who was building new barns, when it was said to him, “ Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee ”—and in the parable of the unprofitable fig-tree, where the Lord of the vineyard came three years seeking fruit, and found none, when it was said, “ Cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ? ” And for one year more the Dresser of the vineyard interceded, saying, “ Lord, let it alone this year also.” For which of us can tell whether this may not have taken place respecting ourselves ; that for us God has so diligently watched until now, and that His word has already gone forth, “ Cut it down ? ”

But above all things, is this suddenness of death set before us in the warnings which are so repeatedly given us, respecting the Day of Judgment and our LORD'S coming. For although all these are spoken of the Day of Judgment, we cannot but suppose that they are in some degree spoken of our own deaths also.

For we read “ As it was in the days of Noah ”—and “ As it was in the days of Lot ”—“ so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man ”—not only we may suppose in the days when HE comes to Judgment, when all these warnings shall be more signally fulfilled—but also in all the days of the Son of Man, the days of Christianity, is it being fulfilled. To every one it is said, and

perhaps in the case of every one it is fulfilled, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with ME, to give to every man as his work shall be." We cannot doubt but that to all it is said, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." And "Watch ye therefore—for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

These four watches of the night, we may very well suppose to be four seasons of the night of this life (for this life is often called night), childhood, and youth, and manhood, and old age,—at whichever period we are called away, doubtless it is in general very awfully sudden when it does come, whether it be at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning.

And are not all these words, in which our LORD's coming is described, applicable to death: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always!" For we must remember that where the tree falleth, there it must lie, and therefore wherever death overtakes a person, there judgment finds him, so that in this sense, even if in no other, it is in the days of the SON of Man, as it was in the days of Noah.

And not only does Holy Scripture thus press upon us the great necessity of being always ready, as knowing not any day or night, that we may not hear the sound of the Archangel's trumpet, and see "the judgment set, and the books opened:" but moreover, there is no fact which our experience does more fully assure us of than this, that death is constantly overtaking one or other amongst us, and that too, very often, suddenly; those who have eaten, and drank, and talked, and lived among us, and who humanly speaking had no cause to expect so great a change more than ourselves, yet on whom the book of life has for ever closed,—and an unchangeable eternity has already opened,—persons who but the other day had the same pursuits, the same feelings, the same hopes and fears, and earthly expectations and projects, as ourselves: nor can we give any reason why we should not be now where they are; and they instead speaking of us, as

we now do of them. Not one of us can tell how soon others may not thus have to speak of us. But however this may be, of one thing, I think, we may be assured, that, whether we die soon or late, yet death will overtake us before we expect it; and he that looks out for it, and expects it daily, will find that he is much nearer the truth than he who does not. So that in whichever way we take it, it must be allowed that the veil or curtain, which is drawn between us and the eternal judgment, is so thin, that any day of our lives we may find ourselves on the other side of it:—the door shut—the time of trial for ever gone and past—eternal unchangeable ages begun. Now this being the case, there is no use whatever in our turning our minds away to other things, in order to forget it; for it remains quite as true, whether we think of it or not. The sun is in the sky all the same—though we might force ourselves to believe it was not, and that it was night. There is nothing in the world more easy than to do this: we have only to engage our thoughts, as soon as we depart from church, or from the grave of a friend, with some little trifles, which are sure to present themselves before us, or rather I should say to be presented to us by the evil spirit, who is ever on the watch—and we shall soon forget all about it. But as there is nothing more easy, so there is nothing more foolish than this, for we must think of the great realities sooner or later; and the less we do think of them now, the more we shall have to be sorry for at our death and through a long eternity. The end is unavoidable—you may look around you to the world—you may look above or below—yet nevertheless it is ever straight before you, and every day and every hour nearer and nearer; and you must at last look it in the face—and see Death and Judgment standing before you—not to be avoided, nor evaded, turn yourself away, this way or that—to any objects you like, think of it or not—you must be one day nearer to it every day you live.

If therefore the serious and timely consideration of these things is so necessary for every one who has to die, what is the reason why we are each of us so determined, as it were, to put it aside; and in fact take all the means in our power to drive it away; when any moment of our lives we may be overtaken by the reality of that from the very thoughts of which we shrink and turn away?

The reason in great measure is, because we consider such contemplations as unpleasant, and therefore are ever ready to get away from them. But why should they be so unpleasant; indeed, so gloomy and terrible? It is we ourselves that make them so in a great measure. These frequent intimations and warnings respecting our speedy and sudden and certain death, are doubtless given to us by our Heavenly FATHER out of His great mercy and love to us; and all His gracious and kind dealings with us, even though they be warnings and cautions—yet ought to be made by us in some sense a matter of comfort and encouragement—not unpleasant duties which we would turn away from, but thoughts that we would embrace and cherish as coming from HIM.

Now the state of the case is this; we are here placed in circumstances of considerable hazard and danger, on account of the various temptations which surround us. These temptations are of a nature far greater and more manifold than any thing we could have supposed, were it not for what the Bible informs us respecting them. Especially from some wonderful influence, which we are taught to believe that evil spirits possess over our minds,—if by a careless life we put ourselves out of God's good protection. Whether it is by throwing bad thoughts into our minds, and so by degrees, if these are not resisted, obtaining a hold more and more, and the possession of our heart, so as not to be without great difficulty expelled; or by bringing before us from time to time, those temptations which they know we are most liable to be led by; or whether it be by turning away and diverting our minds from prayer and works of charity, and from meditating on CHRIST's sufferings and the Communion of His Body and Blood: however it be, there is no doubt of the fact that they are thus very busily employed about every human soul with exceeding craft and cunning; and always gaining an advantage over us, so far as we are not constantly seeking God's care and protection, by all the means of grace, by watchfulness and prayer.

And besides the power which these evil spirits have on our minds, when we forget God, by their own wicked influence on our thoughts, they have two great instruments or means, which they too often successfully employ. One of these is the world,—which is so much in their power, that it is called in the catechism

the wicked world—and Satan is called in Scripture, the Prince of this world. Now what a powerful instrument the world is in the hands of our great adversary is often allowed in words as a matter of course; as, for instance, when we speak of worldly people, or worldly principles, we mean the opposite to Christianity: but yet its influence on ourselves we very little consider. For instance, by the power of its example, for the broad way is the way that leadeth to destruction; the power of its temptations, for a rich man can scarce enter into the kingdom of Heaven; the danger of its good opinion, for the “friendship of the world is enmity against God;” its pleasures, for he “that liveth in pleasure is dead.” And yet although this be true and allowed in words, yet we cannot calculate how much influence the world has on our own minds; how much it mixes itself with our thoughts so as to lead us to form an untrue judgment of things—to look on those objects as matters of importance, which are mere trifles—and to consider the things we hear and see so much about in the world as real and substantial, when they are in fact of very little importance: and in short, to judge of persons and of circumstances, very differently to what God and His good Angels do. The consequence of all this is, that we get excited, and taken up from time to time by some passing concerns, which occupy our thoughts with cares respecting the morrow, and so are in danger of forgetting our substantial and eternal interests.

The other instrument which the great enemy has to effect this purpose is, the tendency of our own heart, which we cannot doubt is, as the Scripture expresses it, “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” We have, indeed, a better nature implanted within us who are baptized, as it is said, “The Word of God abiding in us”—*i. e.* by our obediently walking accordingly in faith and repentance, and cherishing this divine life and light by prayer and the sacraments: but yet, whenever we fall back, or become remiss and lukewarm in these means of grace—there will be springing up in our hearts desires which will afford the evil one means and opportunities against us. As long as our time of trial lasts, these dangers will continue.

Such being our condition, thus encompassed with manifold temptations, the ALMIGHTY has of great mercy supplied us with every thing that can work upon our love and our fears, as as-

sistances and support to our weakness. And among these, the uncertainty of our own death, and the suddenness of those around us is one.

But now this, and indeed all temporal calamities and sorrows, although they may be considered as awful warnings to work on our fears, but yet are they all mixed with mercy, and are no less than His blessings and encouragements, the sign of God's fatherly anxiety and tenderness for us.

For this uncertainty of our lives may be made a great blessing to us, if we would consider it as we ought in all reason to do. The power of things seen and present is very great, and when we fancy that we may live thirty or forty years, this power is greatly increased; it seems to put the great and unseen eternity with all its awful realities at a distance. But when we are brought to reflect that in a few days or hours it may be all over with us as far as this world is concerned; that the objects which we now think so important will then appear quite as trifling as the circumstances of a dream when we awake; that by this time next week, or to-morrow, we may be in the actual presence of GOD and of JESUS CHRIST, in a way beyond all conception at present; this is a very moving thought. It is enough to still and set at rest every feeling of unkindness to others, of discontent in ourselves; it is enough to bring us to our Heavenly FATHER with all that awe and dependence with which we ought to think of HIM at all times, and to make us very zealous in doing His work.

I do not know any consideration which, if duly cherished, would have such an impression upon our hearts, and tend more to make us what we should be. We ought to rise with this thought every morning, and retire to rest with this thought every night,—that in twelve hours we may be in the presence of our Judge, and the door closed.

This is not a mere fancy or imagination to excite the mind, but a real substantial truth; that a day will come which will be our last on earth, and the first beyond the grave; and that we never know whether this may not be that day.

Many things in nature are awful from their suddenness; a flash of lightning—a loud clap of thunder close to us, is apt to startle and amaze the stoutest heart. What is this to sudden death? it is nothing at all: for the very next death that occurs,

may be one which will take ourselves off where no eye shall see us more.

Now I know full well, as I said before, that no one will believe this, that he shall be thus taken off; merely because we are alive, and it has not happened to us; but of this I am sure, that the more any person is in earnest,—the more he really takes God at His word, and thinks of what eternity must be, the more short and uncertain will he feel this life to be.

And the moment we are on the other side of the grave, we will be beyond all conception astonished how we ever could have thought it to be so long. Until then it will be with respect to us as a thrice told tale—flat and unprofitable, and our SAVIOUR'S words will be to us, as when HE said to the JEWS, “if I tell you ye will not believe.”

But then we shall see in some very wonderful and mysterious manner the full sense of such words as these :

“Seek not ye what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink.”

“Sell that ye have and give alms,—provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens that faileth not.”

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”

“And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.”

“And this know, that if the good man of the house had known in what hour the thief would come, he would have watched.”

“Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

“And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch !”

# S E R M O N    X X X I X .

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## THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

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### REVELATIONS xx. 11, 12.

“ I saw a great white throne, and HIM that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before GOD; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

HOLY Scripture does not teach us to think so much of death, as of our LORD's coming, and the Day of Judgment; and this it seems to press upon us in every kind of way, and to be constantly reminding us of it; inasmuch as there is nothing which we are so unwilling to think of, and which it is so difficult for us to realize. Indeed, when our attention is once turned to it, it is quite remarkable how many things God has made to remind and warn us of it.

Thus our blessed LORD has told us, that the judgments of God which came upon the old world, were to us as signs and emblems of that great Judgment. HE says that it shall be as it was in the days of Noah; when men were, up to the very last, engaged in their worldly business as usual, when the flood came upon them suddenly, and those only who were in the ark with Noah were saved. In like manner, our LORD says that the destruction which came upon guilty Sodom was a sign of the same thing, when they were eating and drinking and warned in vain; and the



Angel did as it were with much difficulty get Lot and his family to escape out of the burning city ; seizing them by the hands, and earnestly pressing them to flee in time. And as if it were to show us that these signs of our LORD's coming were not confined to the times before the Gospel, when our LORD has given us at length a description of the day of Judgment in the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of St. Matthew, He so closely connected all the circumstances of it with the destruction of Jerusalem, which was to happen about forty years afterwards, that we hardly know which of the two His words most apply to, the destruction of that city, or that of the world. Teaching all people thereby, when they witnessed or heard of the destruction of Jerusalem, to think of the end of the world.

And these three instances which our LORD has recorded, would teach us to look upon other events of the same kind, as intended to be to us gracious warnings of that one great event to which all things are hastening. Thus, when the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt, and suddenly at midnight there was a great cry, and God brought out His own people in great haste, we cannot but see that this also may have been intended to remind us of the day of Judgment. In like manner, in after times, when we read of the wicked city of Babylon being taken at midnight, when men thought not of it, God would surely admonish us of that great day which will come suddenly, "as a thief in the night;" and "as a snare." In that great city they were feasting at night, when Cyrus, whom God "had called by name, and held by His right hand," came suddenly upon them, and took them all; at a time when at the feast of Belshazzar, they saw a handwriting on the wall, which Daniel was interpreting, "Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting."

There is another instance, which may be mentioned, in the book of the prophet Joel: God brought on the land of Israel a heavy judgment by a vast cloud of locusts, which ate up every thing in the land; but God's inspired prophet had so described it, as if it were the great day of Judgment he was speaking of at the same time, and in the same words. He says, "the earth shall quake before them, the heavens shall tremble, the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their

shining.”—“ He is strong that executeth His word ; for the day of the LORD is great, and very terrible ; and who can abide it ? Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye to me with all your heart.” We cannot but see in this that it is something more awful than the swarm of locusts which God is speaking of. Afterwards it is added, “ Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly ; gather the people.” Now we know that as the Jews were called together to their assemblies by the sound of a trumpet, so the sounding of a trumpet is often mentioned on the day of Judgment ; “ the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised ”—the archangel shall descend with a shout and “ the trump of God.” Now this description in the prophet Joel reminds us, that not the flood only, and the destruction of great cities, but also other judgments of God, such as a destructive swarm of locusts, is intended to warn us beforehand of that great and final day.

In like manner we find it throughout the Prophets and in the Psalms ; thus when we might be inclined to think that it was some great storm from the description, we find on a sudden that it is the day of Judgment ;—“ Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence ; there shall go before Him a consuming fire, and a mighty tempest shall be stirred up round about Him. He shall call the heaven from above ; and the earth, that He may judge His people.” And then we find that the whole Psalm is an account of the great day.

Thus, sudden and terrible judgments of God, and perhaps all things of an awful nature, are calculated to remind us of the last Judgment. And indeed a heart that is wakeful and watchful, and duly impressed with the terrors of the LORD, will find circumstances constantly occurring, which seem mercifully intended to carry our thoughts onward to that time : and not only in sudden destructions and storms, and things of that nature, but even in other matters. How often is there some day, or object of concern, some event comparatively important to us, that we have to look forward to ! it may be, it appears long in coming, and we think, as it were, that it will never have arrived : but it very soon comes, and passes ; so also, we should think, will the day of Judgment soon have come and passed. Sometimes, again, some great occasion in our lives seems to have arrived ; and our thoughts and spirits are

full of commotion at finding it come indeed ; and we feel anxious to know if we are fully prepared to meet it : and we think how much more we should do if we had but a little more time to prepare for it ; and every thing else, and all our past days, seem of little importance in comparison with this one occasion. This again should lead us to think of the day of Judgment, compared with which the greatest occasions of this life are utterly trifling and insignificant.

But how, it may be asked, can we realize the day of Judgment ? how can we set before our minds that which will be so utterly different to all that we have yet seen, and to all that our thoughts can conceive ? This, indeed, we cannot do in any manner, and therefore we must keep as close as we can to the description which holy Scripture has given ; for by so doing we may be sure that we shall approach nearer to the truth than by any other method. Now, the chief point in all the accounts of holy Scripture is its rapid, sudden, and unexpected coming—"at midnight was there a cry heard ;" and the words repeated at the end of the Bible, "Behold I come quickly," "surely I come quickly." But what is extraordinary, it appears that in the mean while it will appear to men to be long in coming ; so that people will say, "Where is the promise of His coming ?" It appears evident that it will take men entirely by surprise ; it will be in such an hour as they think not ; and yet this will be owing to men's carelessness and worldly lives, for it will be such that a good man might, if he were to watch and pray, know that it was coming. Thus St. Paul says, "Ye are not of the night, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of the light." And our LORD says, "When ye see these things come to pass, lift up your eyes, for your redemption draweth nigh."

But there are a great many circumstances, which are to precede the coming of that day, such as famines, and earthquakes, and wars, and afflictions, and the rising up of Antichrist, that is, the great enemy of CHRIST's religion : which some have supposed to be the Roman Catholic Church ; and some the spirit of liberty, as it is called, or democracy, which is now spreading throughout the world, and is the opposite to CHRIST, the spirit of whose religion is obedience. And, indeed, Scripture speaks of "the lawlessness" of the last ages, and calls Antichrist "the lawless one." Whether these signs have already taken place, or not,

we cannot be sure ; nor can we be sure in what way they are to happen, for prophecies can very seldom be understood or interpreted before the events take place, for they generally are beyond the thought of men ; and therefore, though these warnings are so distinctly described by our LORD, yet they will be so little understood, that notwithstanding them all, that Day will take the world by surprise, which of course could not be the case if they were fully known and recognized when they happen. They may be the circumstances of many years, they may be only of a few days. Immediately after these things, we read that “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.” Often, both in the Old and New Testament, are we told that the heavens shall depart as well as the earth ; and they who have kept God’s commandments shall alone abide, as it is sometimes said, “the righteousness of God,” or “the Word of God.” Now, when it is considered what the stars are now found out to be, many of them worlds so vast that the earth is, in comparison with them, but like a grain of sand, or a speck of dust, it might be thought that it can hardly mean that all these immense worlds should be moved, only that they would appear to be so. But when, on the other hand, we think of the value of one human soul, that can never die, but must live in misery or in happiness inconceivable, and which shall never end ; and when we consider what it is for all those who have ever lived to have their everlasting condition assigned to them ; when we consider, moreover, what it is for God Himself to arise out of His place with all His majesty and glory, to move from the heaven of heavens, to come to earth and to be seen by all His creatures ;—it surely is not too much to believe, and we may keep to the very words of Scripture in believing literally, that the “stars shall fall, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind ; and the heavens depart as a scroll when it is rolled together.” And it is then the accounts tell us that “the Son of Man shall be seen coming in the clouds, with power and great glory, and all the holy angels with Him.” “And He shall send His angels to gather His elect from the four winds.”—And the words of the text describe

to us what follows: "I saw a great white throne, and HIM that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before GOD, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." As the prophet Daniel had before described it, "thousand thousands ministered unto HIM, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before HIM; the judgment was set, and the books were opened."

Now all these things which shall then take place, the heavens being rolled and moved away, and the earth departing;—and the Angels of GOD which will then come to view;—and all mankind from the beginning of the world, the great and good men that we have heard and read of, and our own relations and friends whom we have lost sight of when death took them from us;—all these will be to us of no interest and concern: for we shall as it were have no eyes to see, and no ears to hear any thing, on account of one thought which will so fill our souls, that we shall have no mind for any thing else: and this one thought will be what there is written in those books concerning ourselves; for on that it will depend whether we are in the book of life or no. I say all these strange sights will concern us not in any way, on account of the great importance to ourselves of that judgment; inasmuch as nothing will ever concern us more after that sentence: what is desired therefore is, that we should now set aside other matters, and the affairs of others, and their conduct and their condition in GOD's sight, and consider our own case, as we shall then be obliged to consider it. The examples of others are nothing to us: if they are going wrong it will be no excuse for us; because the wrong way is broad, and many there be that travel along it: this will afford no comfort to us at that day. Nor, on the other hand, are the opinions of others respecting ourselves at all to be trusted, as they cannot know us: if they think us honest and pure, and we are not so in GOD's sight, it will not profit us then. Therefore what is to be desired is, that each should consider his own case as he is in GOD's sight. What the things are that those books will contain, out of which we shall be judged, we know very well; for Scripture has declared to us expressly what they

are. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of CHRIST, in order that we may receive the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil." "For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of Judgment." "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And not our words and actions only, but our thoughts also shall then be brought to light. "Judge nothing," says St. Paul, "before the time, until the LORD come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

Now the Christian lives by faith; and our faith is especially exercised about the day of Judgment, because we do not see how it can take place: many secretly in their hearts disbelieve it, or think that somehow they shall escape, because they do not see how it is possible, being so different to what they see. But we know that all things are possible with GOD; and that it is as easy for HIM to bring to light every thought in our past lives, as it is for HIM to have made us and keep us alive. It was in like manner that the Sadducees of old would not believe in the Resurrection, and our LORD said that they greatly erred, because "they knew not the Scriptures, nor the power of GOD." If therefore we take the Scriptures into account, and the power of GOD, then it is infinitely certain, and infinitely easy: nothing in the world can be more sure, nothing that we behold more real and true, being the declaration of GOD; for our LORD has said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Now it is the hearty belief and persuasion of the judgment to come, that makes all the difference between a good and bad Christian. How does it come to pass that some men are so well pleased with themselves, so busily taken up with the thoughts of business or pleasure, and so indifferent about sin? Their words and actions they seem very careless and unconcerned about; and if they have done any thing that is wrong, that brings no immediate bad consequence with it, they are as well pleased with themselves afterwards, as they were before. And they wonder how other persons should be so particular. They think the Christian religion the best religion that ever has been in the world, because in it God's mercy to mankind is revealed. They are glad that CHRIST should be preached every where; that the

good tidings of salvation should be published; they do not think it matters much where it is, whether it is according to God's ordinance from His own appointed ministers, or any where else which is not according to CHRIST's appointment. They think it very necessary for men to be honest and just in their dealings; because a good character is a great thing in the world. And thus they live and die without fear, and the reason is, because they do not believe, or rather do not consider a judgment to come.

On the contrary, how is it, it may be asked, that good Christians think themselves "miserable sinners;" and he who labours most of all, like St. Paul, "to have a conscience void of offence both towards GOD and towards man," calls himself "the chief of sinners?" How is it that he who labours most earnestly and diligently to keep the commandments, always declares that he has no hope but in JESUS CHRIST? How is it that the best men are always the humblest men, *i. e.* men that in truth serve GOD the best, walking blameless in all the ordinances of religion, think most lowly of themselves? How is it that such persons are so very particular about keeping close to all GOD has ordained and appointed; His sacraments, His Ministers, the sacred days of His Church? are so accurately observant of little duties and private prayer, and more concerned at the omission of these things, than others at the commission of great sins? The reason is, because they have a hearty belief of the judgment to come,—and therefore tremble at GOD's word: for our LORD has said, "Fear not them that kill the body, but fear HIM who after HE hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear HIM."

The difference therefore between good and bad men consists in their believing, and considering, and realizing to themselves, or not, the doctrine of a judgment to come. Some do it more and some less. But now it is very evident our believing it or not, though it makes all the difference with respect to ourselves, yet it makes no difference with respect to that judgment itself. That is equally certain, whether we think of it or not; that equally approaches nearer and nearer every day, whether we are looking out for it and preparing for it or not. It will not wait till we are ready. The chariot-wheels of that dread tribunal will not tarry because we refuse to hear the sound of them as

they approach and become louder every returning year. Whether we turn to the right hand or to the left, that equally draws near to meet us. It is not only certain, but it is the only future thing which is quite certain: even death itself is not quite certain, for judgment may come before it; nothing future is quite unavoidable but this.

So also the Eye of GOD that watches and takes account of us, is equally as much upon us, whether we think of it or no. And every day we live adds something to the contents of that book, either of good or evil. Whether we are sensible of it or not, GOD is equally present, and we cannot escape from HIM. "THOU art about my path, and about my bed," says the Psalmist, "and spiest out all my ways. For, lo! there is not a word in my tongue; but THOU, O LORD, knowest it altogether." Nor can he think of any mode whatever of escaping from the Eye of GOD; nor indeed does he wish to do so. "Whither shall I go then from Thy SPIRIT, or whither shall I go then from Thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, THOU art there: if I go down to hell, THOU art there also." "If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with THEE, but the night is as clear as day." There is therefore no escaping the Eye, and the Hand of GOD: even on that day when GOD shall be revealed, we read that many shall "call on the mountains to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them"—but in vain; the mountains themselves, we are told, and the hills shall flee away before His face.

So closely and mysteriously are we even now encompassed and wrapped round by His presence, in a manner that we shall then be brought to understand and know. What therefore must be our conclusion,—the only one that we can come to,—but this, earnestly to pray to GOD to make us sensible of these things before it be too late! what other prayer or desire can we form, but that which the Psalmist expresses at the close of this most beautiful Psalm, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."



# S E R M O N XL.

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## THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

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GALATIANS vi. 14.

“GOD forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

IF we were to be asked what is the great and distinguishing mark of St. Paul's character, it might be said to be shortly contained in these words of the text.

Whatever we read of his doing in the Acts of the Apostles, and whatever he says in his letters, he seems to be always full of the feeling which is thus expressed. The divine and heavenly wisdom, the great charity and earnestness for the good of others and self-denying forgetfulness of himself, which abounds in all that we know concerning him, seem to flow from this great principle, written in the depth of his heart, in these words: “GOD forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

And this deep impression which had sunk into his soul and influenced all his thoughts, often breaks out in expressions such as these.

Thus in another place he says, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for CHRIST, yea, doubtless, and I count all

things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS my LORD, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win CHRIST, and be found in HIM ;”

“That I may know HIM and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”

And in another place, “I am crucified with CHRIST: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but CHRIST liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the SON of GOD, who loved me and gave HIMSELF for me.”

And surely if we were to study St. Paul, and try to know what spirit he was of, we should say that he was one who appeared quite dead to all things which the natural man desires, and to be, as far as this world is concerned, no longer alive, as he says, and that all his thoughts, and words, and actions were such as to prove that he could not be a mere man, but nothing less than CHRIST JESUS living in him, and speaking and acting in him.

So much did his mind appear to be absorbed in the thought of JESUS CHRIST suffering for him and for all mankind, as if his heart and affections were dwelling with HIM that was gone.

Thus did he speak of filling up that which was behind of the sufferings of CHRIST, and called upon others to be followers of him as he also was of CHRIST.

And this state of being crucified with CHRIST, he speaks of being necessary for all Christians.

“They that are CHRIST’s,” he says, “have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

And again, “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized unto JESUS CHRIST, were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried in HIM by baptism into death; for if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,—knowing this, that our old man is crucified with HIM.”

And again, “for ye are dead, and your life is hid with CHRIST in God.”

Not to multiply passages of this kind, which are very numerous; we may perceive that this is nothing else but following up

and exemplifying the commands of our blessed SAVIOUR to all Christians, "that they must bear their cross after HIM."

And perhaps, by the merciful providence of GOD, it was so ordained that this should be signified by that transaction which the Evangelists have recorded as taking place at our LORD's crucifixion; of a person being made to bear our SAVIOUR's cross after HIM, a sort of type or prophecy of what the Church, i. e. all Christians, should do to the end of time.

The crucifixion of our blessed LORD is not only the wonderful love of GOD set before us in the atonement for our sins, and the example of His unspeakable humility, but it is also a pattern, a sort of representation and lively image of what we are to be; namely, crucified together with CHRIST from all worldly affections as long as we are in this life.

That these are the terms upon which alone we are made partakers of the benefits of CHRIST's death, the Church sets before us in the service of Baptism, very distinctly. Indeed, the sign of the cross, with which we are then signed, is a token of this, and we pray that, being buried with CHRIST in His death, the baptized Christian may crucify the old man, so that as he is made partaker of the death of the SON of GOD, he may be also of His resurrection. We are told that we should always remember that baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to be made like unto CHRIST, that as HE died, so we who are baptized should die from sin, continually mortifying all our evil affections. So that you see every Christian who hopes to be saved by the sacramental washing of baptism, is bound through the whole of his life to be able to say with St. Paul,

"GOD forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

This is certainly an awful and serious reflection, for it may be asked, Do Christians in the present day consider it?

And yet it may be clearly shown that the Gospel throughout does require this of all who would be saved. And the Epistles do throughout imply the same, and all the Old Testament distinctly points the same way in the light thrown upon it by the New.

St. Paul, when thus speaking of himself, in the passages before

alluded to, does not think that by being so crucified to the world and the like, that he was doing any great matter, which it was not necessary to do in order to be saved ; but on the contrary, he says, that all this was, " If by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead, not as if he had already attained." And in another place he says, that he thus mortified himself, " lest he should be himself a castaway."

Now this, I say, is an awful thought, for it cannot be thought unnecessary to our salvation to do that which an inspired Apostle thought absolutely necessary for his salvation, i. e. to be dead and crucified to the world, and glorying in the cross of CHRIST alone.

But some who will allow it to be most necessary to all Christians, yet may think that somehow or other they are so, or in fact not think seriously at all about it, but indulge a fancied thoughtless security, concluding that by some means or other all will be well at the last.

In the sense which the Apostle speaks and which the Bible requires, I fear that there are extremely few, indeed, who are thus mortified, so as to be able to use the words of the text. And yet if we cannot, there can be no solid grounds for a Christian's hope ; and if we have no solid grounds for hope in CHRIST, what will become of us without an effectual change of life ?

We may see by the strong expression, " God forbid," that the Apostle put it far from him, as a thing quite unsuitable to his Christian calling, that he should glory in any thing else but the cross.

And the reason of this was, because, as a matter of course, he was by that cross crucified, that is to say, become gradually dead and mortified to worldly desires : and all the pride of this world was become by the same crucified or dead to him, such as could move him no more, or affect him.

Now a great deal might be said about the benefit of self-denial, of subduing and mortifying the desires of the natural man, and of the necessity of our being dead to this world before we can ever be alive to another. And a great deal might be said about the necessity of Christians loving one another, and loving God above all things, and of feeling so great an interest and anxiety about their own salvation and that of others, as not to mind

earthly things. But the fact is, that more than the tongue of man or angel could teach of these things, is taught by that one consideration of the cross.

Therefore, says St. Paul to the Corinthians, he "determined not to know any thing among them but JESUS CHRIST and Him crucified."

He had no eloquence of preaching, he says, for his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible, and no worldly wisdom to induce men to repent—but only the cross of CHRIST.

He tells the Galatians not to trouble and interrupt him about other matters, for he was not his own but belonged to another; for he bore on his body the marks of the LORD JESUS; as if, like a slave, he had a mark burnt on his body to say to what master he belonged, which mark was the cross.

Did he expose himself to much toil and hardship? it was, he says, "bearing about in the body the dying of the LORD JESUS." The thought of the cross was to him his eloquence; it was also his wisdom; it was also his protection; and it was also his consolation. For it implied by itself alone more than all that could be said to him, and more than his words could convey to others.

For consider, was CHRIST crucified indeed, the Almighty GOD HIMSELF, who made and supports all the world by the breath of His mouth? Was the painful way of the cross the way which HE chose? then what folly and what madness for such as we to suppose that any other way but that of the cross, of being by self-denial and humility dead to the world, can be salvation and safety to us!

If we look to the heavens above, or to the deep below, if we look before and behind us, and all around, there is no other way but that of the cross. If there was any other easier and better way, surely CHRIST Himself would have chosen it, and pointed it out to us.

Or if HE might have chosen one way, and another way might do for us, then HE would not have told us that whoever would come after HIM, "must take up His cross and follow HIM."

Nor would St. Paul have told us, that if we would reign with CHRIST we must also suffer with HIM.

If there was any thing else in this world which was truly valuable, surely JESUS CHRIST would have chosen it. It would be

impious indeed to suppose the contrary; for it would be to suppose that the all-wise God Himself could be mistaken in the true value of things. And surely nothing can be truly valuable to us which was not so to HIM.

CHRIST is called the true Light, because HE shows us the true worth of these things, respecting which we are so apt to form erroneous notions.

And therefore a day will come when, if we have gloried in any thing else but in being made conformable to His sufferings, we shall find ourselves to have been exceedingly mistaken.

To respect wealth, and the station which it gives to others, as being an ordinance of God, is becoming to Christian meekness.

But to think highly of wealth, and to covet increasing riches for ourselves, or to glory in them, is not to know of what spirit we are of. It is rejecting the cross, and thinking of another way for ourselves besides that which JESUS CHRIST hath taught.

And if the cross of CHRIST was something which so changed the heart of St. Paul as to affect all that he said, and did, and thought, so also to glory in any thing which this world considers great, whether it be riches, or honour, or learning, will affect all that we say, and do, and think.

And as surely as the Bible is true, so surely is this, like things we imagine in sleep, a mere delusion, from which we shall some day awake, and see that it was so.

We shall dream that we have something in our hands, and wake and find it is nothing; or that we are catching at a substance, which we shall find a shadow.

Consider again; was it for our sins that JESUS CHRIST endured the cross?

Then sin must be something very different from what we are wont to consider it.

Then the way which we are used to live from day to day must be something far more important than we are apt to suppose.

Then an eternity of happiness or of misery must be something infinitely greater than our poor thoughts can enter into.

For otherwise, how could a sacrifice of such infinite worth have been required?

Has any one a great sin on his conscience, which he feels no

time can lessen, but which must find him out at the day of Judgment, and then be brought forward? If he flatters himself that the great GOD, all holy, can pass it over as a light matter, let him reflect, that after he had been washed by CHRIST'S blood in baptism he polluted himself thus, instead of being made, as he then undertook to be, conformable unto His death.

Let him think over what a sacrifice it required to put him into a state of salvation.

And that though it be true that "the blood of CHRIST cleanseth us from all sin," yet it is only "if we walk in the light even as HE is in the light;" i. e. of course if our life is in some measure like His.

It was a sense of these things that was perhaps present in the Apostle's mind when he exclaimed, "Knowing the terrors of the LORD, we persuade men."

But if we are duly sensible of all this, more than the fear of falling short of so great salvation, shall we feel, as St. Paul also says, "the love of CHRIST constraining us?"

For not only if we are crucified to the world will all envy, and hatred, and covetousness, die within us, but also a serious and frequent consideration of the cross of CHRIST will open our hearts more than any thing else to that divine love and charity which is alone availing.

In short, the sum and substance of the whole matter is this: if this great Apostle was thus crucified with CHRIST, thus dead and mortified in all his desires and affections, if it was this principle, viz. the cross of CHRIST in the depth of his heart, which marked all his character and influenced all his conduct, then surely if we would learn that divine love which shone forth in him: if we would derive all those blessed influences which flow from the cross of CHRIST, as St. Paul did, and that sure strength and refuge which is to be there found both in time and eternity, we must also be, not in word and profession only, but in very deed crucified to the world, as St. Paul was. Then only can we at all adequately enter into the sublime sense of such words as the following, which express the mind of that blessed Apostle:

"Who shall separate us from the love of CHRIST? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through HIM that loved us.

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come ;

“Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD.”



## S E R M O N XLI.

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MUCH FORGIVEN AND LOVING MUCH.

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ST. LUKE vii. 47.

“ Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much.”

WE must all remember the occasion on which these words were spoken. Our LORD had been sitting at the table of a Pharisee who had invited HIM : but it does not appear that this Pharisee had received HIM with any great respect, but rather as he would a mean and humble person, such as our LORD appeared to be. It was the custom in those countries to receive honourable guests with salutation, with water for the feet, and ointment for the head ; but none of these marks of respect had been shown HIM ; when there came in a woman who had been a sinner, who heard that HE was in the house, and stood behind HIM weeping, and began to “ wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet and anointed them with ointment.” We cannot but suppose that she had heard our SAVIOUR teaching, and had thus been deeply wounded to the quick, at the sense of her sinful condition. Perhaps HE, knowing what was in the heart of all that heard HIM, had said something that particularly applied to her own case and life : and thus oppressed with an awful sense of His holiness, she had perhaps heard HIM say something that poured comfort into her wounded spirit : and she might have witnessed, together with his exceeding hatred to sin, His power and willingness to heal and restore persons who came to HIM. It is at all events evident, that what she did proceeded

from a very deep and strong feeling in her heart, for we have our LORD's own testimony that she loved much—loved much HIM who was infinitely holy, and just, and good.

Now we see that the Pharisee, although he had invited our SAVIOUR to his table, yet seems to have had but little true reverence for HIM, not only because he had not received HIM with any great tokens of respect, but he seems to have had some doubts whether HE were really a Prophet or not; he seems superciliously and scrupulously watching HIM, and when this woman thus approached our SAVIOUR, he began to think within himself that HE was no great prophet, not to find her out. Little did he think how thoroughly our LORD was acquainted with his own thoughts, and with all his past life, and that of the poor penitent also.

Our blessed LORD, partly perhaps out of compassion for the poor woman, who was thus despised by the Pharisee, and partly out of kindness for the Pharisee himself who had received HIM, says, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he says, "Master, say on." "A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty: and when they had not to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore which will love him most?" Simon answered, "I suppose he to whom he forgave most." Our LORD said unto him, "Thou hast rightly judged." And it is very evident, from what follows, that by the person who was forgiven five hundred pence, is meant the poor woman before HIM, who was a sinner; and by him who was forgiven the fifty, that HE meant the Pharisee himself. For indeed the poor woman showed that she loved much, and the Pharisee that he loved but little. Are we then to suppose that the sins of this penitent woman were in the sight of GOD worse, and so much greater than those of the Pharisee? And are we to suppose then that the more wicked a person is, the more sins he has committed, the more he will love GOD when HE has forgiven him? Surely this we cannot think, for we know that the more sins any one commits, the more hardened he becomes, the less capable of loving GOD at all. We know that the effect of sin is to harden the heart, to blind the eyes, and make the ears dull of hearing. How then can he who has committed many and great sins, ever love so much as he who has not, although indeed he does repent, and his sins are forgiven him?

Now, I think, we may explain it the more clearly by observing our LORD's mode of speaking to the Pharisees on some other occasions; when they murmured against His keeping company with publicans and sinners, HE told them that HE was not come "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Now we cannot suppose that HE meant these Pharisees to be really righteous, for we know that HE denounced them at another time as exceeding wicked, and spoke of them in the parable as less justified in GOD's sight, than the poor publican. And when HE said to them, "Those that are whole need not a physician, but those that are sick," surely HE did not mean that the Pharisees were whole, and needed not the Heavenly Physician. But doubtless this implied that they considered themselves righteous, and as whole, and that therefore HE would leave them to their own blindness; but that they should not keep away from HIM those who felt that they had indeed need of one to keep and heal them.

And so likewise on the present occasion, this woman had indeed been a sinner, but surely not lost in sin; she may have been placed in circumstances of very great temptation. She might, perhaps, have been brought up very badly, and with wicked people, and partly on these accounts fell into sin; but surely, though she had fallen, she had not lived in habits of wickedness, so as to love sin, for otherwise how could she love HIM who was infinitely holy and good. She felt, indeed, the weight of her sins very grievously and heavily; she doubtless thought over all the aggravations of them, till they appeared five hundred-fold, in her sight, worse than those of others. She would readily have believed and acknowledged that her sins, in comparison with those of the Pharisee, were indeed as ten-fold: in the same way that the Pharisee would readily have considered himself as the one who owed but little. But surely the Pharisee could not be, in fact, so much better, if at all better, than this sinner: perhaps far worse. A good man feels a great reverence and respect for holy persons, which he must have seen and known our SAVIOUR to be. St. Peter himself falls at our SAVIOUR's knees, confessing himself a sinful man. The holy St. Paul confessed himself the chief of sinners. Faithful Abraham called himself "dust and ashes" before God. The holy David says that he was "a worm and no man:" and Job, "Now mine eye seeth THEE, wherefore I abhor myself, and

repent in dust and ashes." So that we see the holiest men of old felt and acted more like this woman, who had been a sinner, than like the Pharisee: the fact is, that the more a man thinks of God, the more will he feel himself a sinner: and the more he feels himself a sinner the more will he love God: not the more he has been a sinner, far, very far from it. The Publicans were indeed called sinners by the Jews, on account of their great hatred of them, because they mixed with the heathen; but in the sight of our LORD, the Publicans were far more accepted on all occasions, and therefore we may be sure that they were really and in heart far better. Often do we learn from HIM that the Pharisees were but like whited sepulchres, which were beautiful without, but within full of uncleanness; that they took great care to cleanse the outside of the cup and the platter, to keep a fair exterior, but that they took no care of the heart: that they were very censorious of others, and that all their righteousness was to be seen of men. And though there appears no reason to believe that this Pharisee was one of this description, yet from all these circumstances we may conclude, that our LORD was very far from saying that he was in fact so much better than the poor woman, but that she felt her sins most, therefore she loved most. And he that is forgiven little loveth little, doubtless means he that feels he has little to be forgiven, loveth little.

But it was the custom of our LORD, as HE knew the hearts of all men, to speak in a way that would touch the case, and search the heart of each; and so we must suppose that these gracious words were such as would not only comfort the penitent, but tend to show the Pharisee also his error. For when he was told that although he might be, as he proudly supposed himself to be, good and righteous, yet it was very clear that he had not the love which the poor woman had: surely if he had any goodness of heart he must have been affected by this,—that the person he so despised had ten times the love he had; shame and sorrow must have arisen in his heart, in place of the pride and contempt he had just expressed; this would have turned his thoughts a little more upon his own life, and if he would but seriously have looked upon his own condition in God's sight, and in the holiness of JESUS CHRIST'S presence, then, certainly, he would have been ready to cry out with the holy Paul, that he was the chief of sinners—then, instead of receiving JESUS CHRIST so coldly and proudly,

he would have fallen at His feet, like the poor woman, and feeling that he had very much to be forgiven, he would have loved much. So gently and so mercifully were the words of our Lord calculated to have influenced this man, at whose table He sat at meat.

But to this penitent woman herself, and to all other distressed penitents to the end of the world, how much gracious consolation is contained in these words, "Her sins that are many are forgiven, for she loveth much." And also, "He to whom he forgave most loveth most." For when people are much cast down and oppressed with the thoughts of their past sins, which all sincere Christians must doubtless often be, when at such times (and indeed it were to be hoped at all times) nothing in the world appears to them of any consequence compared with the hopes of forgiveness, they look very much to any expressions of consolation in Scripture: they eagerly take hold of them, they dwell upon them, and find repose and confidence in them. Now to such persons there is a peculiar force and propriety in these words; had it been said, "He that hath sinned little loveth much," then they would say there is no room for them in such promises, for they have sinned much: the more they love God the more will they feel that they have offended Him; he that has injured a dear friend, whom he sincerely loves, feels such an offence very much more than if it had been committed against an indifferent person, and indeed the offence is very different, and, therefore, he who has the highest and truest notion of God's holiness and goodness has the deepest sense of his own sins. And therefore, when such persons read that "he who is forgiven much loveth much," then, indeed, they feel that this is applicable to their case.

And such are many other merciful assurances of the Gospel, such as are understood by humble and sincere penitents; for the best of Christians are in fact nothing else but the lowest of penitents. A good man, among Christians, only means a thorough and earnest penitent; his righteousness consists in feeling himself most deeply a sinner; inasmuch as he is least of all hardened and deadened by sin, and, therefore, is most alive to his own danger.

Such expressions therefore as these, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you;" and, "Blessed

are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted ;” these meet their condition, for of this they feel assured, that they are indeed heavy laden, “ that they do indeed mourn,” and therefore they cannot doubt but that these words were spoken to them. And so it is by the blessing of God, that even that which appeared to them the greatest and most real of all calamities,—the magnitude of their sins, and the deep affliction which they feel in consequence,—becomes to them a matter of exceeding comfort. For feeling that they have much forgiven, they love much ; and mourning much, they are much comforted.

Now we know that there is nothing which will stand at the last day but love ; for charity, as St. Paul says, *i. e.* love, never faileth. If we have faith without love, though it remove mountains, yet it will profit us nothing, and though we have works of the best kind, giving our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, yet without love, it will be of no avail. And here we have the assurance, that he to whom much is forgiven loveth much.

This, therefore, must be our labour, to have much forgiven,—to this we must devote our lives, to have more and more a sense of our sins, and thoroughly to repent and amend them with sincere sorrow, that, so thoroughly and heartily repenting, we may be forgiven and love much. For, doubtless, we have all much, very much, which needs forgiveness, and many of us sins which must be forgiven before we die, if we would enter into life. The whole of a Christian’s life must be a continual study to find out his sins, to confess and acknowledge them, and, fully to get the better of them, to practise ways of humiliation. For the same person who in seasons of fasting and mourning, or under some heavy affliction, sees and acknowledges that he has many and great sins which need forgiveness, will soon after, when in prosperity, or under the excitement of business, or company, or politics, forget that he has any sins that need forgiveness at all. And many pass through their whole lives in this state, full of a careless confidence even to the last, loving little or not at all, because they feel that they have but little, or nothing at all, to be forgiven ; and therefore passing out of life with a load of unrepented sins upon their minds unforgiven.

But it is necessary that they who have much to be forgiven

should love much in order that they may be forgiven. Three times did our SAVIOUR ask this question of St. Peter, "Simon, lovest thou me?" after he had thrice denied HIM; as if it had been love only that could seal his forgiveness and pardon, and again restore him. And this love, when CHRIST departed from him, was to be shown by feeding His flock. And in this and in many other expressions, HE has told us, that until His coming again, our Christian brethren, and especially the poor and all who are in need, stand to us in His stead; that what we do to these we do to HIM.

Surely works of charity to the poor will be accepted of HIM, like that precious box of ointment by which HIS feet were anointed; and surely acts of mourning, and grief, and sincere confession of our sins, though in secret, will be received by HIM, who seeth in secret, as much as the tears of the poor woman; and works of self-abasement and humiliation, lowering ourselves to the dust, and walking, as it were, near the ground, will render us in His sight like her who wiped His feet with the hairs of her head.

Such are the actions that become the penitent sinner; and he who thus lives, loving much because he feels he has much to be forgiven, and showing his love of GOD by the love of his neighbour, may receive to himself the consolation given to this penitent, rather than to the self-satisfied Pharisee. For if he loves much because he has much forgiven, then great will be his reward in heaven; for it will be according to the greatness of his love.

To such, the Absolution of the Church, pronounced by CHRIST'S minister, and His blessing and peace, and above all things His holy Sacraments, are full of consolation; because in them they hear, as it were, CHRIST'S own voice pronouncing their forgiveness, as to this poor woman.

Indeed, to them who live a life of repentance, an active and diligent life of Christian love, the holy services of the Church are full of profit and comfort in a way that they cannot be to others. It is like coming into CHRIST'S presence. For now, as of old, when HE was present in the flesh, all may come into His presence; but some sit unconcerned, like the Pharisee, not acknowledging CHRIST, not conscious of His infinite holiness; not feeling, there-

fore, that they have much to be forgiven. Some kneel down more with the feelings of the poor penitent, and they alone depart with the blessing of CHRIST, having a quiet hope, that in His name and for His sake their sins are forgiven.



## SERMON XLII.

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### BUILDING AND ADORNING CHURCHES.

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2 SAMUEL vii. 1, 2.

“ And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies,  
“ That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of GOD dwelleth within curtains.”

ONE would think that scarce a stronger reason could be adduced to prove the approach of that time when “ the love of the many shall wax cold,” than the present state of churches<sup>1</sup>.

It is now more than 80 years since Bishop Butler referred to and confirmed an expression of Bishop Fleetwood’s, who had observed, at the beginning of the last century, “ that unless the good public spirit of building, repairing, and adorning churches prevails a great deal more among us, and be more encouraged, an hundred years will bring to the ground an huge number of our churches.”

Whether or not this has been literally fulfilled, I will not stop to inquire. No one will, I suppose, maintain that “ this good public spirit”—or rather sacred spirit—has revived among us since that time.

In our metropolis, or any of our large towns, one cannot but be struck with the fact, that as we proceed from the ancient to the more modern parts, the sacred buildings become less nume-

<sup>1</sup> Preached in the year 1834.

rous and less magnificent, while the abodes of private individuals vastly increase upon us both in number and in expense. To which it may be added, that in appeals that are made for subscriptions for building churches, and indeed in a regulation which this society<sup>1</sup> itself has thought proper to adopt, a provision is made that there shall be no unnecessary costliness; no unnecessary expenditure shall be incurred in the structure and decoration of these sacred edifices.

And in support of this rule it is maintained, that it is not right to expend money in embellishment when the poor are unprovided with room.

This is in some measure true; but then let us be consistent in the application of this rule: let us not apply it merely to the things of GOD, lest we deprive HIM of His due, but to ourselves also.

Enter into our houses; may it not likewise be said, Why is all this cost and unnecessary embellishment, when there are so many of the poor unprovided with necessary food and clothing?

Do we then apply this rule merely to the things of GOD?

Do we think that nothing is too good for ourselves which we are able to procure; nothing too valuable or handsome which art or skill can supply, and that any thing will do for the service of GOD, while the poor are unprovided?

Are we to keep the best for ourselves, and to restore to the Giver of all good merely the refuse of His bounty?

Might we not so curtail our wants as to become thereby infinitely richer in ourselves, and do far more both for the immediate honour of GOD, and for JESUS CHRIST, as still to be found among us in the poor members of His Church?

But then it may be thought, that in our present enlightened views of religion, the heart of the worshipper is to be considered as every thing; that it matters not in how homely a place GOD may be worshipped, so long as it is "in spirit and in truth."

This is in one sense true, but when thus stated it conveys a great fallacy.

The differences of earthly splendour can indeed be nothing to HIM whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain; and HE is

<sup>1</sup> The Incorporated Church Building Society

there most graciously present where HE is most honoured; but the fact is, that a desire that GOD should be worshipped in the most worthy manner is the very proof of the right state of the heart. Let me not dwell in cedar while the ark of God dwelleth within curtains, is one of the first expressions of natural piety, and mentioned as highly approved of by GOD HIMSELF.

That we cannot lay out too little upon ourselves, nor too much to the honour of our Maker, is the obvious feeling of a humble mind.

There is a very affecting circumstance recorded in the Gospel, which bears, I think, strongly on this point. It was the good Mary who had chosen the better part, who had saved what she could to embalm our SAVIOUR with very precious ointment. All who were present seemed to be united in saying, according to the suggestion of Judas, Why was this waste when it might do so much for the poor? And perhaps we might have been disposed to say, what could such a poor honour be to the SON of GOD? what value could HE attach to such things, who was pleased to become "the very outcast of men?" Surely it would have been more pleasing to HIM for it to have been given to the poor.

Not so did our blessed SAVIOUR accept it; so graciously indeed did HE receive it, that as the house was filled with the odour of the ointment, so has it pleased HIM that His Church to the end of the world should be fragrant with the memory of her piety.

And if we wished for authority to apply this circumstance even more closely to our present subject, we have it in the most marked and favourable acceptance of the poor widow's mite for the service of the temple, which had cost her much, but was quite lost from worldly eyes in the more ample contributions of others.

In another point of view, sacred architecture is a matter of very great importance, inasmuch as it gives vent to certain feelings of the mind. Our ancient churches, combining such vastness, and strength, and beauty, prove that the persons of the age when they were built were thus embodying more worthy conceptions of GOD; and they cannot but have a tendency to impress those that enter them with similar feelings, of the vastness, the strength, the beauty of holiness.

And it cannot but be observed that a pious reverence and awe

at those places, where God and His holy angels are more especially present, has very much decayed together with the increasing neglect of these buildings.

And yet such a feeling of sacred and religious veneration is, I doubt not, of the very highest importance towards our well-being as Christians.

A great writer on Christian practice recommends that every person should have some particular spot in his room, or in his house, where he should consider God as especially present, in order to add fervour to his prayers, and increase holiness of mind. Now this is nothing but a substitute for the ancient pious feeling respecting the presence of God in churches.

But the importance of this subject is forced upon us by infinitely higher authority than any such observations of our own. It is very remarkable that our blessed SAVIOUR, in driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, both at the beginning and at the end of His ministry, acted in a manner different from every other action recorded of HIM in Scripture. This is much to be considered, for doubtless it must contain some lesson of very singular value : and what else can that lesson be to us than this,—that a sense of the sacredness of holy places must be a matter of the very deepest importance to the state of our minds as Christians ?

But there is another subject which seems more to press itself on our notice on the present occasion than the worthiness or sacredness of our churches, and that is their number.

For the question now brought before us is, whether a considerable portion of our fellow Christians should, amidst the wealth and luxuries of the age, have any means of Church ordinances and prayers at all.

We are, perhaps, ourselves, especially in this place, well provided in every respect : but no thanks are due to us for this, nor to our generation ; we have received these blessings from the bounty of others : have we, in return for this, done the same for those who stand so much in need of these advantages ?

Is it not the case that the extensive falling off from the Apostolical institutions in these kingdoms has been owing in great measure to the want of churches, which has been in many parts of this kingdom, and still is, very great ? so that persons have

been led to seek unauthorized modes of instruction and worship, merely because it has been the only means of their procuring Christian communion at all.

Are we not responsible for all this—for having received most bountifully, but having been too unwilling to restore in the like measure again?

Complaints are sometimes made respecting the difficulty of building and endowing churches, which is certainly very great; but persons who make these complaints seem scarcely aware that this difficulty arises solely from the decay of that spirit of our forefathers, by which these means were supplied.

Such being, as I conceive, the case, it is right that we should clearly see it, and be humbled under a sense of our great neglect under unequalled blessings; such humiliation being the only temper of mind in which any real amendment can take place.

But at the same time it is certainly right that, while we condemn ourselves, we should hope the best. It may perhaps be explained by the circumstance of the great external prosperity which the Church has long enjoyed, and that, having kings for her nursing fathers, she has leaned too much on worldly aid, and been weakened thereby.

But the time is now come when she cannot but distinctly hear the voice of our God and SAVIOUR speaking to her, and saying, "Put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them." And therefore we may hope that she will be led to lean on her better Strength, and so be strong; and that she may now come forth out of her difficulties, "as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a giant to run his course."

Were this nation filled with churches, and those churches filled with sincere worshippers, as they ought to be, how might the incense of daily prayers, amid aboundings of evil principle, which cry to heaven against us,—how might our daily prayers, I say, have overtaken these, and brought down a blessing instead of a curse! In these sacred precincts we are in a manner lifted up nearer to heaven; so much so, as that here, at all events, we may be quite above hearing the noise and feverish excitement of the world, which in some shape or other must ever be arrayed against us.

That we are, and have been so long, permitted thus to meet

together, and worship God without molestation or danger, is of itself a subject for sincere thankfulness: we must remember that this has not always been the case with Christians; that it is by no means a matter of course, but the exception, and the privilege; and the only right temper of mind is to be thankful for this, while it lasts, as for a mercy of which we are utterly unworthy.

Here let us more and more flee for refuge, and to those blessed hopes which it tends to support and strengthen, and do what we can to afford to others the same blessings.

This appeal appears to be one of the strongest that can possibly be made to us; for a charity of this kind not only partakes of the character of that blessed act of love before alluded to, which was done to our SAVIOUR'S honour, but combines likewise the benefit of our poorer brethren, and that likewise a benefit of the most substantial kind; and far more valuable, if but so valued, than food and clothing.

For the poor, being despised of the world, have the Church for their strong hiding place and refuge. It is not in any way a sacrifice opposed to mercy, but the highest mercy combined with the best sacrifice.

And this Society, which has done so much, and has so much more to do, has likewise this peculiar claim,—that its assistance is supplied according to the urgency of the case.

For assistance to any particular appeal is often in great measure withholden, from a consideration that there are other cases more urgent.

Let us, therefore, hope confidently, and let Christian hope be never entertained excepting to quicken and invigorate exertion; let us hope confidently and do valiantly.

The time is come when the Church may take up again those words which she used of old,—

“Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not: for we preach not ourselves, but CHRIST JESUS the LORD, and ourselves your servants for JESUS' sake.”

“For GOD, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD, in the face of JESUS CHRIST.”

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of GOD, and not of us. We are

troubled on every side, yet not distressed : we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed : always bearing about in the body the dying of the LORD JESUS, that the life also of JESUS might be made manifest in our body."

"For which cause we faint not."

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

To those who know no pain equal to that of seeing unchristian principles prevailing, too often under the cloak of Christian profession, no times perhaps can be more distressing than these ; but the more distressing they are, the more should we be excited, and again and again should we stir up ourselves, and call upon each other not to fret ourselves against evil-doers, who are to us "a sword of GOD ;" but to dwell habitually, as a source of comfort and principle of action, upon the blessed hope of better things ; and by so much the more as we see the Day approaching.





## SERMON XLIII.

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WE MUST HAVE ROOT IN OURSELVES.

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ST. MARK iv. 16, 17.

“These are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness: and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time.”

It is, indeed, a melancholy and affecting picture, which these words of our blessed SAVIOUR present to all considerate minds: the picture of one listening to God's holy word, receiving it with real joy, going away, in his own and others' account, full of good purposes and holy desires to keep it,—and, after all, falling back into his sins; unable to withstand, to any good purpose, the first serious temptation he meets with. The seed falling on stony places, and presently springing up, because it had no deepness of earth, but scorched, as soon as the sun was up, and withering away for want of moisture: this is not half so disappointing to the husbandman, as such flattering beginnings are to him, who is entrusted with the souls of Christians. Two or three such instances are often found enough to blight altogether men's prospects of doing good, and to make them quite give up the thought of beholding, in this world, any considerable fruit of their labours.

But the case becomes yet more fearful and lamentable, when one recollects from Whom proceeded this affecting description of it. He who valued the souls of men so dearly as to quit His

FATHER'S bosom, and lay down His life for their sake ; HE tells us expressly, that many of those souls, for all His infinite love, will be lost : not for want of opportunities of hearing what they ought to do to be saved : not for want of attention or interest in listening to His Divine instruction. They hear, and they hear with joy ; and yet it does them no good. Why ? but because they have not the seriousness, the courage, the constancy, the self-denial, to *do* what they have heard, when occasion is given ?

It must needs be a peculiar grief and disappointment to the blessed REDEEMER of all our souls, when persons come so very near His Kingdom,—seem as it were on the very brink, and ready to throw themselves, once for all, into the depths of His unspeakable mercy ;—and then He beholds them starting back,—contradicting all the favourable expectations which good men and good angels might have formed concerning them : sinning themselves, and causing others to sin, in the very first moment of strong temptation. Who would not wish to save his best Friend, his REDEEMER and SAVIOUR, such a sorrow, and so vexing a disappointment, as far as he is himself concerned ? If for the present you “ receive the word with joy ;” if you really admire the beauty of holiness, the wonderful tokens of wisdom and mercy made known to us in the blessed Gospel : you shrink, of course, from the thought of making it void ; it is a real pain to you to imagine yourself, in some future trial, forgetting all, and falling away. Now then, while you are yet well-disposed ; before the good thoughts have passed away, and the seducing world has found room and leisure to lay hold of your fancy again ; now hear, and earnestly consider, where your great danger lies. *If you wish to do more than endure for a while, it is absolutely necessary you should have root in yourself.*

By the expression, “ have root in themselves,” it seems that our SAVIOUR would put us on our guard against two errors in particular : the error of those who have no root at all ; taking up good thoughts and wishes as a matter of liking and fancy, not of duty and principle : and the error of those who seem to have a kind of root, who may go on apparently well, and keep good rules for a while, but of whom, by-and-by, it appears but too clearly, that their root (if it may be called so) was not in themselves, but in others.

First then : it cannot be denied, weekly and daily experience proves it but too certainly, that there is such a thing as receiving the Gospel merely into the surface of one's mind : so that it may make no small show to ourselves as well as others, for a time ; and yet no root be struck, no real hold taken, no effectual purposes of amendment entered into.

For instance : what shall we say of those, who make the reading of the Scriptures and other good books, and the waiting on the public service of the Church, a matter of mere liking and fancy ? It is certainly very possible for any person so to deceive himself ; considering, what all must allow, that the Bible, besides containing the way of salvation, is also, in many other respects, the most interesting and engaging book in the world. Observe how children are taken with the thousand beautiful and affecting histories, which the condescending Providence of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT has left for their and our learning, from the very earliest days of the world ;—observe how they listen to the story of Joseph, or to the miracles and death of JESUS CHRIST our LORD, long before they have any proper notion of the religious meaning of those passages ; of applying them to save their own souls. It is very obvious that the same way of reading and hearing may be practised at other times of life : and I wish there were none of us, in this respect, who continue all their lives “ children in understanding ;” none who read the Gospel for mere amusement, as they would any other remarkable narrative ; receiving it with eager joy, as wonderful and beautiful in itself, but thinking very little of it afterwards, to any of those purposes for which GOD intended it.

In like manner, with regard to the service of the Church, many—I may say, most—parts of it, have so much beauty and majesty, that it should seem as if every attentive hearer, naturally of himself, must for the time be affected with them ; except he be utterly lost and hardened. When in the more immediate presence of the great and dreadful, yet most merciful God, the person more immediately dedicated to His service begins to speak to you in His name, on that which most concerns you for ever :—when the silence of God's house is broken by God's minister rising up, and repeating some one or more of those gracious promises of His, with which our daily services begin :—no person, surely, who does but in earnest try to attend to what is going on,

can help being impressed with it for the time. Or when a child is brought to be baptized, or the body of a neighbour laid in the grave, are not the Collects, Psalms, and Lessons, so chosen, the service altogether so wisely and kindly ordered, that every one, who really listens, must feel the beauty and propriety of it? There are times in both these services—the Baptism and Burial Services, I mean,—when most men, however inclined to be unthinking, are apt to have their attention caught, and to enter into the spirit of the Prayer Book. But it does not at all follow from this, that any real, abiding good is done. The attention is engaged, the fancy pleased, the feelings interested, for the moment: but no care being taken to continue the good effect, and make it habitual, the mind is taken up, it may be, the next hour, with something of a very different nature,—something as bad as the Church Services are good.

The voice of the Prayer Book, and of the Scripture itself, has done such persons no more good, than the Jews received from the prophet Ezekiel: to whom God gave this account of his hearers. “Son of man, the children of thy people still are talking of thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not.”

Every one must have seen, at one time or another, these words exactly verified in men’s way of listening to their favourite teachers. They listen, and are delighted with what they hear, just as they would be with a fine singer or a skilful musician; but it hardly seems to occur to them, that what they hear is afterwards to be *done*. Something of the same kind, I fear, is not seldom chargeable on the readers and hearers of the Bible and Prayer Book. Many parts of those sacred books are in the literal sense, “lovely songs of one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument.” I mean, of course, the Psalms of David. Have men nothing to answer for, think you, for heark-

ening to them, all their lives long, as though they were mere beautiful songs,—for not endeavouring to be the wiser and better for them?

Again: the instructions of the ALMIGHTY may be heard, and gladly heard, yet may fail to bear good fruit, from being considered only as matter of *learning*. Men are anxious enough to obtain knowledge, and to have their children taught. It is the great boast of the present day, and some people seem to expect every kind of good from it: not always recollecting, as they ought, that knowledge, the knowledge of good and evil, impatiently and unseasonably sought, was the snare which ruined man at the beginning. But now it is very evident, that this appetite for knowledge, apart from goodness, may be indulged in regard of the knowledge of GOD and CHRIST, of our duty and the way of salvation, as easily as in regard of any thing else. Mere curiosity, the simple wish to know what one's neighbours know of these things, may lead men to Church, may send them to their Bibles, may render them attentive readers and hearers; and there may be an end of the whole matter. If so it turn out, they are the worse surely, and the more pitiable, for this knowledge which they coveted so much. The knowledge of GOD, without the love of HIM; the knowledge of CHRIST, without striving to obey HIM; the knowledge of the Holy SPIRIT, without behaving as in His presence; is only fit to pervert and ruin the soul. And yet many seem to go on, as if they had done great things in the way of salvation;—their own salvation and their children's;—if they have taken care to have plenty of *knowledge*: forgetting that plainest and most undeniable of all maxims, "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is," more especially, "sin."

Again, mere *personal* attachment, respect or liking to this or that teacher, may lead men, for a time, to have pleasure in his lessons, and yet may not have so much influence, as to cause them to be recollected when trial comes; and to enable the soul by their help to triumph over evil inclinations. Here, as before, it is sad to think, how utterly and entirely good beginnings, or what seemed such, are thrown away. A child, we will suppose, loves his parent, a Christian his pastor, a friend his friend, so well, that for their sake he is content to receive religious instruction.

He hears the word with joy, because it comes from one who is dear to him: but let any thing happen to change his teacher; let the parent die; the pastor be removed; the friend forsake him;—his interest in holy things will be gone at once. This is no imaginary case: we see continually with our own eyes, what sad fallings off take place, when men lose their accustomed guides. A sure sign, whenever it happens, that the most has not been made of their instructions. *They* have been too much depended on, and *HE* who commissioned them too much forgotten. Now this is matter of the deeper regret, because these same affectionate feelings, which bind men so strongly to this or that instructor, are the very dispositions by which their Maker intended to teach them the practice of true piety. They who loved their parent, their pastor, or friend, so well, why could they not learn to love their God, their Redeemer and Sanctifier? Then, happen what might to their instructors here, their pleasure in religious instruction would have lasted; for God can never die, nor ever cease to teach those who will hear HIM. Then, they *must* have practised what they had learned: for they would have felt, that HE who taught them was always in sight. Then, they would have “endured” for ever, “as seeing HIM who is invisible.”

One might here go on to the case of those, who come readily to seek Christian knowledge, or send their children to learn it, merely for the sake of that worldly advantage and praise, which knowledge of any kind is almost sure to obtain. A child's fortune is bettered, in many respects, by his receiving what is called “a good education;” and therefore they are pleased to have him taught; and for the same reason, they are pleased with any chance of improvement, which they themselves can lay hold of; and this may sometimes give them the appearance of “receiving God's Word with joy:” nay, they will occasionally flatter themselves upon no better ground than this, that they are in earnest about religion. But it is, indeed, building on the sand: they cannot bear tribulation or temptation. How should they? since the very reason, which made them seem interested in religion, was only a part of worldly prudence?

So many kinds, it seems, there are, of willing but unfruitful hearers of God's Word: some led by mere fancy, others by

curiosity and love of knowledge ; some by personal attachment to their teachers, others by vanity or temporal advantage : agreeing all in this evil circumstance, that they are all as plants which have no root ; until they have been improved by a course of sincere Christian obedience.

I come now to the other error, which our SAVIOUR might perhaps mean to reprove more especially, when HE added, “ They have no root *in themselves.*” As much as to say, That what root they appear to have, is not really in themselves, but in others. Their seeming progress in Christian holiness depending altogether on something in other men, cannot make good *their own* account, nor save *their own* souls.

There will never be wanting Christian persons deeply concerned in this warning, as long as men are so very easy in following what others do, as a matter of course, without inquiry : as long as they give way to the extreme folly of ordering their faith and practice by the mere fashion of the world in general. For indeed it is *extreme* folly : it being certain, first of all, that the world in general is very likely to go wrong ; and we know it will have no power at all to plead for us in the day of judgment. Numbers, fashion, the countenance of the multitude, will be no kind of shelter then ; particularly after the many warnings which GOD and HIS Church have everywhere given us, of the wickedness of this world of ours, and the utter danger of depending on it. “ We are of God,” says St. John, in the name of all Christians : “ We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” It will never do, after this, to excuse ourselves for any sin or neglect of duty, before either GOD or man, by saying, “ The whole world did the same.” How then can you be contented for a moment to leave the great concern of your souls to the random chance of the world’s being right ? How dare you say, “ I will believe, live, and pray, as my neighbours do ? I am content to take my chance with them :” when you know that the SON and SPIRIT of GOD are come down from Heaven, on purpose to help you to believe, live, and pray, as you ought ?

Consider this also ; that if the world in any case happen to be right, and the fashion a christianlike and a good one to follow ; still it is no thanks to you, if you follow it without inquiry, merely because it is the fashion. As for example ; suppose it the custom

of any place, regularly to attend the public worship of God, as often as ever His Church is open; it is possible for a man to go regularly, without thinking or caring much about why he goes. Example led him there first, and habit afterwards keeps him there. And when he is asked about his dealings with God, very likely he will give himself credit for being good and religious enough, simply because he has, in this manner, gone to Church since he can remember. What a pity, if any such there be, that he should have profited so little by the devout prayers and holy lessons which he hears in this sacred place! What a pity to suffer this evil world, this empty name of custom and fashion, not only to teach so much of what is wrong, but also to spoil and corrupt, in so great a degree, what was so near being good and right!

Sometimes men go by the advice or example, not of the world about them, but of some particular friend or favourite: which is a very good help in the way of holiness, provided the friend or favourite be well chosen, and that men take him only *as* a help, not depending entirely on him; nor on any thing else but God, who cannot fail. But without these cautions, what will become of your goodness, supposing your friend should disappoint or quit you? Make haste, therefore, and fix your heart upon that sure and only Friend, who never can do either. Let God in CHRIST be your adviser, His will and pleasure your rule: lean not on any mortal so, as ever to omit taking counsel of Him.

But if it be dangerous to trust even in what people do *well*,—to act with a view to the example and advice of those who are really good,—how much more fatal and ruinous is that ordinary way of the world, to spoil their religion by vain comparisons with what they see others doing *amiss*? “I am well enough, I think; I am sure such an one is much worse;” or, “To be sure I am blameable in this way, but in that, another is far more so:” or, “If I am in danger for this or that sin, what can be said for my neighbour who commits it? and yet he is generally well spoken of: I do not want my chance to be better than his.” Are not these indeed “bruised reeds,” for a soul to trust to in matters of eternity? God has made you in His own image, to choose the good and abhor the evil. He has brought you into covenant with Himself: you know what you have promised to Him: His Holy SPIRIT HE has also given, to help you in keeping that pro-



mise. The covenant was personal and positive between you and your Almighty FATHER, that you should do such and such things : there was not a single word breathed in it of any kind of comparison with others.

I beseech you, therefore, let us once for all turn away from that wretched custom of continually pleading our neighbours' faults, in order to keep ourselves in countenance. We must die, and meet our GOD, alone : our neighbour will not be there to help. The only help we can have, then, must come from our Judge and SAVIOUR Himself : in whose merits we can have no part, except we take Him at His own word, and try in earnest to have root in ourselves.

## SERMON XLIV.

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THE WORLD'S CONDUCT TO THE MAN OF SORROWS.

*PREACHED ON GOOD FRIDAY.*

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ISAIAH liii. 3.

“He was despised and rejected of men ; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him : He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

THERE is not a verse of this chapter of Isaiah at which one might not very well begin, as St. Philip the Evangelist once did to the Eunuch, and preach the whole doctrine of CHRIST crucified. As it was in the counsels of Almighty GOD, that His blessed SON should endure for our behalf all the various afflictions which we have deserved, so this famous prophecy touches one after another the several sorrows which HE endured. It speaks of His intense bodily pain ; “ HE was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.” It speaks again of the grievous oppression, the wrong, injustice, undeserved ill-usage, which HE had to sustain. “ HE was oppressed and afflicted, yet HE opened not His mouth; HE was brought as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so opened HE not His mouth.” And here, in the beginning of the prophecy, mention is particularly made of that which was the root of all the rest, and which many persons would feel as the bitterest of all ; His being despised and scorned. “ HE shall grow up before GOD as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground : there is no form nor comeliness ; and when we shall see HIM, there is no beauty that we should desire HIM. HE was despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief ; and

we hid as it were our faces from HIM : HE was despised, and we esteemed HIM not."

Now this is a prophecy, first and chiefly, of what our gracious LORD was to suffer in His own proper person. HE was to be a Man of Sorrows, and *because* of His sorrows HE was to be despised. Such is the pride and bitterness of our sinful nature, ever since the fall of our first parents : which began with the lust of the eyes, Eve indulging herself with the *sight* of the forbidden fruit ; and which has gone on ever since, men refusing in general so much as to look at the afflicted, "hiding, as it were, their faces" from them, because such sights interrupt their enjoyments and satisfactions.

Something of this kind we may every day behold, in the behaviour of those who are at all hardened by the world towards the afflicted and low-spirited, when they come in their way. They may feel, indeed, some touch of natural pity, but far less than they ought to feel, far less than they used to feel, when they were younger, and before they were spoiled by long indulgence of selfishness. As it is, what are we to think of the ordinary behaviour of persons in high health towards the sick, of flourishing persons towards the disappointed, of high-spirited and cheerful persons towards the feeble and dejected? People like to go on cheerfully and freely in their full relish for the pastimes or employments of the day ; and it vexes them to be intruded upon by ill news and melancholy looks. Accordingly, do we not see a great deal of what one may truly call "hiding as it were their faces away?" as if the very sight of the afflicted were a rude interruption of men's pleasure or business ; as if GOD dealt hardly with them, to put them in mind of their own corruption and frailty, by throwing such sights in their way.

Now then, if ever you feel disposed in this manner to turn away from the afflicted, you will do well to check yourself with the question, "Am I not, in fact, behaving as the Jews did, when they turned away from our SAVIOUR?" "HE was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and therefore they hid as it were their faces from HIM." Surely if we hide our face, peevishly or contemptuously, from any one of His afflicted and poor people ; if we are impatient and displeased with every thing, except what encourages our mirth, or what helps us in our day's work ; we have every reason to think that we too should have hidden our faces

from our SAVIOUR, had we known HIM in the flesh : we should have been impatient and displeased, at being called on to look off our business or our diversion, towards a person so lowly and little esteemed, so very full of infirmities and sufferings. The history of our LORD's life and death is full of instances of this sort of temper ; but none perhaps so remarkable as in the case of the two thieves who were crucified by His side. Even in the very agony of their own death, and that the most painful and shameful of deaths, both of them at first, and one as it should seem to the end, could find it in their hearts to revile our LORD for His sufferings. "If thou be CHRIST," they tauntingly said, "save thyself and us." They cast in His teeth the same reproach as the haughty Roman soldiers and self-satisfied Pharisees did : "HE saved others, HIMSELF HE cannot save." Those dying and blaspheming malefactors were the very type of the world's proud and cruel nature, rejecting and disdaining all fellowship with the poor and afflicted, and refusing to be saved by sufferings, even the sufferings of JESUS CHRIST.

But secondly, the prophecy of the Man of Sorrows relates to the Faith and Religion, as well as to the Person of JESUS CHRIST. I mean, that it represents to us not only the way in which both Jew and Gentile would treat HIM while in sight of men, but also the way in which both then and ever after the world would receive the preaching of His Holy Cross. The preaching of the Cross is, in short, this : That the Arm of the LORD, His saving power and mercy, is revealed from Heaven in the Person of JESUS CHRIST, His only Son and Word, of one substance with the FATHER, who was pleased to take upon HIMSELF our nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, becoming very man as we are ; and did, in due time, offer up HIMSELF a sacrifice and atonement for all our sins ; so that no transgressor can be forgiven or obtain a blessing from GOD, but through HIM, our only Mediator ; and that the way to come to HIM, and be forgiven and blessed is, as HE said, to take up His Cross, i. e. to follow the example of His sacrifice. This is the preaching of the Cross, and in both its parts it is most contrary to the mind of this world. The world, in the first instance, cannot bear to acknowledge that itself is unworthy of any blessing—any good thing at all ;—and that, in order to redeem it, such a deep and wonderful plan, such a condescension on God's part was necessary. Especially those who

are at all worldly wise, are ever set against a plan which seems to them so very strange, so very unlike what they had expected. Thus it was in the days of our SAVIOUR: His Cross proved, to both Jew and Gentile, the bitterest of all disappointments. The Jew was forced to give up at once his proud imagination, of being one of a people who were to be lords over the whole world, and to have their fill of pleasure and grandeur in the kingdom of an earthly CHRIST. The wise men of the Gentiles were forced to give up their haughty schemes of setting all things right by their own wisdom and goodness. Both Jew and Gentile, on becoming Christians, had to renounce what they naturally loved—to give up pleasing themselves; and to embrace what they naturally abhorred,—self-denial, mortification, patience, humility; very often pain, poverty, separation from dear friends, imprisonment, and death itself. For these reasons, when first the Gospel appeared, the whole world was set against it; and why? because it was the Gospel of the Cross. Because it was a Gospel “of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;” therefore it was generally “despised and rejected of men.”

Thus it was in the beginning of Christian faith: men were actual unbelievers in our crucified Redeemer. They sought and found one excuse after another for continuing as they were, Pagans and Jews, instead of humbly bowing down every thought into captivity to the obedience of CHRIST. Those days are over: the power and wisdom of GOD has proved too strong for the selfish pride of man. Even the worldly-wise, in despite of themselves, have now for many ages been compelled to admit, in profession at least, the doctrine of the Cross. Kings, as the Prophet foretold, have “shut their mouths at CHRIST,” that is, the very highest of the great men of the earth can find no more to say against the Gospel. For very shame they dare not resist their own reason, which tells them they must believe in CHRIST JESUS.

But although many are forced, as far as belief goes, to own that what the Scriptures tell us of CHRIST dying for us is all true, they cannot bring themselves practically to submit to the doctrine; they scorn the notion of taking up their own cross. In this sense, very many who seem to themselves sound believers in CHRIST, do in fact hide their faces from HIM. they despise HIM, and esteem HIM not. It is the last thing indeed with which they are ready to charge themselves: they are quite ready to profess, nay even to feel,

that they cannot obtain everlasting salvation by any merits of their own : they look to JESUS CHRIST only as deserving salvation for them : and if at times they find themselves wound up to certain strong feelings of assurance, and of being nearer than others to CHRIST, they consider themselves, for the present at least, quite safe, and have no fear at all but that they have really sure hold of the Cross.

But let no man be too secure. Laying hold of the Cross, in order to eternal salvation, is not a thing to be done once for all, and then let alone for ever. It is a manner and way of life, not a mere feeling to come and go. It is, as St. Paul briefly expresses it, being "crucified with CHRIST," in mind and heart, and temper, and conduct. It is so living that angels observing you may say, "It is not so much he that lives, as CHRIST that liveth in him." In a word, it is giving up your own will, and resigning yourself to CHRIST's will in all things.

People will say, of course, they are not such as this : they put in no claim to angelical perfection, nor to perfection like St. Paul's. But before they flatter themselves that even in some tolerable measure they are *trying* to live in the spirit of CHRIST's Cross, let them compare their own ways of life with those which they know CHRIST approved of.

CHRIST said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" and when HE was indeed rich, (for HE was the Maker and Owner of all things,) "for our sakes HE became poor." How many of those who profess to hold by His Cross follow His example in this respect, really preferring poverty to riches ; contented and cheerful in a low estate, and thoroughly convinced that GOD deals kindly with them in casting their lot among the poor : or if HE has given them riches, living evermore in fear of themselves, and drawing back on purpose from many indulgences, that they may be so far like the poor ?

Again, JESUS CHRIST said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted;" and His SPIRIT long ago taught that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting." And when we consider the thing, we see plainly, that this is no strange doctrine at all ; it is simply saying, that grave thoughts of eternity must be better for an eternal accountable being, than light thoughts of the present hour only. But what says the world in general to this ? what say those (and they are

many thousands of Christians) who are wholly taken up with the pursuit of pleasure, quite impatient of any interruption in it? They may, for a time, have tender and reverential thoughts of our crucified SAVIOUR, when they think of HIM: but their way of life being in reality a contradiction to the spirit and meaning of His Cross, it is much to be feared, and indeed it commonly happens, that these intervals of pious thought become rarer and rarer with them, and the end is, they go on quite at their ease, as if they had never heard of the Cross at all.

If any one thing be more necessary than another, especially for persons beginning life, it is that they should learn by God's grace to guard against the first beginnings of this profane spirit; and should early accustom themselves to watch and pray, lest while they seem to be indulging only in the natural cheerfulness of youth, they be in fact conforming to the world, and training themselves to despise CHRIST crucified.

One sign by which they may try themselves, is the disposition they feel towards self-denial, and towards those who are the great examples of the practice of that most Christian grace. For instance, they read in Holy Scripture of Daniel fasting for the sins of his people, and rewarded by an angelical visit, and a promise from Heaven of the redemption which should be by CHRIST JESUS: they read of St. John the Baptist, his rude and coarse and poor life in the wilderness: they read of St. Paul keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection: above all, they read of our blessed SAVIOUR fasting forty days and forty nights for the purpose, as it should seem, of heavenly contemplation; upon which followed a great triumph over His and our spiritual Enemy, and a visit from Angels ministering unto HIM. Christians read of these things in the Scripture; and how do they feel disposed towards them? have they any desire, according to their ability and measure, to imitate the self-denying ways of the Holy Apostles and Prophets, of the Baptist, and of our blessed LORD HIMSELF? Or do they not rather shrink back from the thought altogether, as something Jewish, and now gone by? Do they not reckon, in some way or another, on being good without abstinence and self-denial? Would they not feel a little inclined to ridicule and discourage the attempts of others, if they saw any smitten with the love of Christian discipline, and trying

to practise it according to the rules of the Church? This is a question, the answer to which may help them to know a good deal of their own disposition to profit by the Cross of CHRIST. If they are unwilling or ashamed to deny themselves a full meal, or a day's amusement, in order to holy mortification, what reason have they, if tribulation or persecution arose, to expect such grace as may keep them from falling away? If they be so unfaithful in that which is least, in the first rudiments of self-denial, who shall give them that which is greatest, a Martyr's crown in the Kingdom of Heaven?

Again, you may know a good deal of your own true mind towards the Cross of CHRIST, by considering how you feel and behave towards the religious scruples of others. For example: there is a great deal of difference between men in respect of the liberties they take in business. Some will make profits, and take advantages, in bargains, from which others draw back, accounting them inconsistent with strict Christian honesty. If any man feel inclined to scorn and slight these latter, as being ridiculously and strangely scrupulous, knowing little of the world, and the like; this is but a poor token of their temper towards the Cross, and those who take it up. So as to speaking the exact truth in conversation; keeping promises punctually, and the like: it is bad enough to fail one's self in those duties; but to scoff or discourage others who attend to them better, is surely a much worse sign.

One very common and very dangerous trial is, when notions and practices, forbidden by God's Law and His Church, are become customary, under whatever pretence. For example, consider the notion that people may choose their own religion according to their own fancy of what will most edify themselves, and the consequent practice of running after strange teachers, without regard or reverence to the warnings of the Church. These things are now become so common, that I suppose it must require some Christian courage, something like taking up the Cross, in any one who resolutely sets himself against them on true Church principles. Surely then, this is a time in which we ought to be much on our guard, how we join in the disrespect and scorn with which the world is sure to treat every opinion or person which it calls *bigoted*. If there be such a thing as Christian truth, and a Christian Church, surely they are to be upheld, and we must



cling to them, in spite of any loss of credit, ease, or profit in the world : and to damp any such purpose, and make light of any such sacrifice, is no light error, but rather a mark that the person so judging is one of those, to whom, if he had lived in our SAVIOUR'S time, the very Cross of CHRIST would have been foolishness.

In this, and in all parts of duty, deeds, not words ; settled behaviour, not passing emotions ; a self-denying mind, not an eager feeling of confidence ; these are what they must practise, who desire to wait with our LORD'S true disciples round the very foot of the Cross, and not to go away, like the mass of the people, just smiting their breasts, and returning to the world and their sins.

And the one great principle to guide and help us in carrying the Cross into our daily lives, is that which our LORD Himself has given : "Whosoever shall be ashamed of ME and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the SON of MAN be ashamed, when HE cometh in His own glory, and His Father's, and of His holy Angels."

Remembering this, let us watch ourselves in our several stations more and more carefully ; thinking no matter or part of our conduct too trifling to be governed by the rule of the Cross. Let it be our happiness, our joy and honour, to live, and if it please GOD, to die, like true disciples of the crucified JESUS. I do not mean, of course, that we can have such a mind at once, but let us at once set about trying to have it. Let us leave off hiding our faces from what the world dislikes to see ; from the poor, the mean, the sickly, the disappointed, from whatever is "despised and rejected of men : " but rather welcome such persons, and wait upon them to the very best of our power, as beholding in them, after a sort, so many images and representations of our despised and rejected SAVIOUR. Finally, whenever need so requires, let us take up our Cross boldly ; let us be in the best sense free and independent, steadily persisting that we will judge of our duty by the rules of the Gospel and not of the world. Let us fear nothing so much as rude or insincere treatment of The Cross : for on our portion in it depends our only hope of escaping eternal ruin.

# S E R M O N XLV.

## THE HOLY WOMEN AT THE SEPULCHRE.

*PREACHED ON EASTER EVE.*

ST. LUKE xxiii. 55, 56.

“The women also, which came with HIM from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how His Body was laid: and they returned, and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment.”

THE history of our LORD's Death and Passion may be called, in a certain sense, the religious history of the whole world. It might, perhaps, be true to say, that all the persons gathered round His Cross, whether as friends or as enemies, do as it were stand for so many sorts of people, and their several ways of behaving to HIM, not in those times only, but in our times and in all times. There were Jews, to represent the open enemies of CHRIST and His Gospel; Pilate, to be a sample of those (not a few), who, being convinced in their hearts that the Christian way is the only right way, yet deliberately give it up for fear of doing themselves harm in this world; Judas, a type of those most miserable ones, who, being specially entrusted by JESUS CHRIST, fall into such sins as to give the Devil an opportunity of entering into them, and tempting them to betray their trust; the Roman soldiers, of unthinking persons, who do as the world bids them, right or wrong, though it be never so much against their SAVIOUR. On the other hand, by God's great mercy, there were also a few faithful and pious servants of our LORD: there was St. John the

beloved disciple, and the blessed Virgin Mother, emblems of the highest degree of faith and love; there was the penitent thief, who died confessing HIM; there was St. Peter, who was even then weeping, probably at a distance, as counting himself unworthy to draw near the Cross of HIM whom he had so lately denied; there was the centurion, owning, like a thoughtful heathen on the way to Christian belief, "Truly this man was the Son of God;" there were Joseph and Nicodemus, rich men both, and both disciples of CHRIST, but in secret for fear of the Jews; there were, lastly, the pious women of whom the text makes mention; on whose example, and the blessing they received, I wish to say something to-day.

It is not for nothing, depend upon it, that the history and names of those women are so mixed up with the accounts of our LORD's Burial and Resurrection. What is said of them was, no doubt, meant as an encouragement to all quiet and simple persons, who should follow them in doing good and waiting on their SAVIOUR. They are patterns of two things which God especially delights to honour;—humble, unpretending, yet earnest devotion, and quiet exercise of the duties of their calling, according to their condition and station in the world.

They were patterns of devotion; for they followed CHRIST from Galilee, which must have been great self-denial. It was much for men, such as the Apostles, to forsake home and parents, kinsfolk and friends, for the sake of keeping close to our LORD; for women to do so, was a still greater thing, in proportion to the feebleness of their nature. Again, they ministered to HIM of their substance; Mary Magdalene especially, and Joanna, who were wealthy persons. St. Luke (xviii. 2.) had told us long before, that such was their practice towards our LORD. They acknowledged in that way His inestimable mercy in healing them of infirmities, or casting out evil spirits. Therefore their continuing near HIM, even in His death, was no sudden impulse of natural pity or any other strong feeling. It was just persevering in a course of duty which they had entered on long before. CHRIST, it seems, had accepted their services, offered in grateful acknowledgment of His mercy, although HE had refused to permit the person, out of whom a legion of devils had gone, to stay with HIM, when he earnestly besought leave to do so. These women, more highly favoured,

were allowed to wait still on our SAVIOUR; and so waiting, they grew in faith, so as not to shrink from attending even on His very Cross. Neither fear of the Jews, nor any kind of shrinking, so natural to weak frames when death is near, more especially death in torment; neither, I say, of these feelings kept them back, or drove them away from their LORD'S departing moments. While indifferent people "smote their breasts," and returned, "His acquaintance, and the women that followed from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things."

It was no more than might be expected, that the same affectionate temper should cause them to be deeply and religiously anxious for His blessed Body after His death. When Joseph and Nicodemus came, and took HIM down from the Cross, (where it is noted as an instance of boldness in Joseph, that he feared not to go in unto Pilate with such a request,) the women followed after, without any doubt or scruple; they seem to have had no thought of fearing the Jews. Neither would they consent to leave to Nicodemus and Joseph the whole trouble and expense of our SAVIOUR'S funeral; though *they* both could well afford it, and were ready to do much: for the one had already bought one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, the other had given up his own new tomb for the purpose. Nevertheless, the holy women would by no means endure to be bereaved of their part in the blessed and pious work; they noted carefully how and where the Body was laid, with a view to get one more task of love,—the last, as they imagined, which they could undertake for CHRIST. They made haste and prepared spices and ointments, in order to do HIM such further honour as they could, as soon as ever the Sabbath should be past.

But here comes in that other point, in which, as I said, the HOLY SPIRIT appears to hold them out as patterns to us. With all their earnest and courageous love, they still preserved the quietness and simplicity of the character which properly belongs to women. We do not read of their breaking out into any kind of wailing or lamentation; they waited, it seems, by the Cross, in silence and resignation, noticing every thing, with that presence of mind, which God often gives to His faithful servants, for their own and others' good, even in times of deepest distress. Having seen the blessed Body in the grave, they do not stay by

it, to mourn and lament, but they lose no time in buying and preparing spices; recollecting (which is another instance of their thoughtfulness), that the Sabbath was near at hand, and then they could not have bought the spices.

How it was so near at hand you may easily perceive, if you bear in mind that the Jews counted their days to begin from six in the evening of the day before. For instance, when it was now six on Friday afternoon, they would reckon Saturday, or the Sabbath, as actually begun. Now, it was three in the afternoon before our LORD gave up the ghost, and we find that Joseph was much hurried to finish the laying of the Body in the grave before the Sabbath should begin; therefore it must have been *very* near six when the women set about preparing the spices: and having so done, says St. Luke, "they rested the Sabbath-day, according to the commandment."

The use I would make of this is, to observe that the holy women did not suffer their earnest zeal and affection for the honour of their MASTER to prevent their keeping, as far as was possible, the outward and ceremonial commandments of GOD also; they did not permit their deep feeling, even on such an occasion as this, to carry them away, as sometimes is the case, and cause them unnecessarily to leave undone any ordinary and regular duties. And this I take to be a great instance of that kind of self-denial which is peculiarly to be practised by women: namely, constraining themselves, in the midst of deep care and affliction, to remember even lesser duties at proper times; much more such duties as the observance of GOD's day of rest;—a thing to be much considered by those, who allow themselves too easily to be excused for slighting our day of rest, the LORD's Day. And it is slighted, remember, not only by unnecessary work, but as much or more by neglect of public worship; by refusing to acknowledge GOD in the assembling of ourselves together.

Observe this, you who so quietly miss the Prayers and Communions of the Church, on every slight excuse of household business or other inconvenience; you who will not rise a little earlier, or otherwise put yourselves out of the way, in order to get things forward, that you may present yourselves the more regularly before your SAVIOUR, to beg His blessing and receive His grace. Observe, the holy women, who were likeliest to

know what would please our SAVIOUR, having been waiting on HIM so many months; they would not, if they could possibly help it, permit even their attendance on His sacred Body, the highest of all labours of love—they would not even permit it to cause them to break the rest of their Sabbath. They made haste; they put themselves out of the way, to get the spices and ointments prepared before Friday was over, that they might leave the whole Saturday free for holy rest.

But the moment that rest was over, very early in the morning of the first day of the week, their affectionate reverence for our LORD had made them active again. They came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. They came as soon as ever they could, “bringing the spices which they had prepared; and certain others with them,” moved, perhaps, by their good example, and in reward for their following it now to be made partakers of their blessing.

They brought the spices which they had prepared, although they were by no means certain that their doing so would be of any use; for, on the way to the tomb, we find them speaking, with the same thoughtful anxiety as before, about the great stone, which Joseph in their sight had rolled to the door of the sepulchre. “As they went, they said, ‘Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?’ for it was very great.” This, with many other circumstances, shows that they had not the least notion of the wonders which God had prepared, to reward their faith withal when they came to the tomb.

Accordingly, the sight of the angel abashed them: “they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth.” So utterly unprepared were they for the joyful message, that some of them, when told “He is risen,” were, it seems, as much troubled with fear and amazement at the sudden interference of the Almighty, as they were comforted at the assurance of the Resurrection of CHRIST. “They went out quickly and fled from the sepulchre, for they trembled and were amazed, neither said they any thing to any man, for they were afraid.” They did not, so to speak, come to themselves, until they actually met our LORD, and heard from HIM, “All hail,” and were graciously permitted to hold HIM by the feet, and worship HIM.

I do not deny but there might in all this be a deep mysterious

meaning, a lesson for us all, as to our LORD's usual way of making Himself known to His servants. As long as HE is known only by the hearing of the ear, by the message of His angels, or of men doing the angels' office, so long the doctrine concerning HIM is full of confusion and amazement. Men may not indeed disbelieve it, but it startles and perplexes them; it takes no settled shape in their minds, nor any fixed hold of their hearts; for those blessed ends, it must be communicated to them by CHRIST Himself. HE must enter in and dwell in their hearts, by His SPIRIT, and give them in some way His blessed Body to touch.

It may be that something like this is shadowed out in the Gospel History of the women's coming to the sepulchre: but, at any rate, we are sure from that history that they had no notion at all of what would happen: it came upon them quite by surprise. They thought of nothing but doing their daily duties, and of showing their love to CHRIST dead and buried, in the best way that circumstances allowed; and behold, GOD made them first of the chosen witnesses, to whom HE showed CHRIST alive: their faith was the first fruits of the Faith of the whole Church; it came even before that of the Apostles themselves.

It is not hard, and to many it ought to be most consoling, to perceive what the HOLY GHOST intended we should learn by this gracious example. Plainly the whole history is full of encouragement, for those virtues and graces in particular, which the women of CHRIST's flock are most continually called on to practise. God's Providence has cast on the female sex a number of homely and minute duties, which many are apt, too hastily, to plead as an apology for their more or less neglect of religion. Here you have a plain instance, how those duties themselves may be turned into part of religion. Industry, for example, in household work of any kind, may be quickened by the thought of getting that work over some minutes sooner than usual, so as to be able to draw near GOD once the oftener in His Church, or at least to approach HIM seriously in private prayer. Charity in thoughtful waiting on men's souls and bodies, even in the least matters, (which seems also to be a great part of the province of females,) may be greatly animated by the recollection that CHRIST reckons such things as done to HIM. Works of mercy, even the

meanest, performed or intended to any of His living members, are as the sweet odours which the holy women brought on the first Easter morning, to anoint the lifeless members of His natural Body. They may not perhaps be wanted for the particular purpose; the cost and price of them may in some cases seem thrown away for the time; but the willing mind which brings them will not lose its reward; it thought to do a little good, to satisfy a kind feeling on earth, and GOD will find a recompense for it in heaven, as much above what it now imagines, as Mary Magdalene's seeing our LORD that morning was above what she had promised to herself, the consolation of waiting on His dead Body.

Let me, in conclusion, once more beg you to observe that this great blessing was quite independent of an exact understanding of the doctrines of religion, or of any thing answering to what we call scholarship, the want of which is so often pleaded as a good reason for being more or less irreligious. The women at the sepulchre were probably in that state of mind, which, when it is found, now causes the persons who are in it to be accounted, by many, poor ignorant women, however full of good meaning. Let not such then, whether men or women, be discouraged: let them be up early, and late take rest, ever busy in good works, waiting on CHRIST's members, and making time to wait on HIMSELF in His Church. Let us all, in such little matters as we can, deny ourselves for His sake; and we shall be sure in time to find that virtue, which comes out of HIM to all those who touch but the hem of His garment.



# S E R M O N XLVI.

OUR LORD IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE.

*PREACHED ON EASTER DAY.*

PSALM xvi. 10.

“Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

WHEN our LORD's chosen witnesses first began, after His departure, to make known His Name to the world, the HOLY GHOST directed them to this Psalm in particular, as containing a hidden treasure of prophecy, long ago laid up for their use, relating to His glorious Resurrection. Thus St. Peter, in the very first sermon ever preached in a Christian Church, on the Day of Pentecost itself; “Him GOD hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that HE should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning HIM, I foresaw the LORD always before my face: for HE is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also, my flesh shall rest in hope. Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to ME the ways of life, Thou shalt make ME full of joy with Thy countenance.” And then he goes on to argue, that David could not mean himself, because his body had been laid in the tomb of his fathers, and had seen corruption; *i. e.* had wasted away, just like the bodies of other men. Therefore he must, as in other places, have been speaking of the Great Deliverer, CHRIST, whom

God had promised, with an oath, to raise up to him out of his family, to sit on his throne. Consequently it was no new thing altogether which the Apostles taught, when they preached CHRIST crucified and risen again, but it was the very thing which they had heard long ago foretold by their king and father David. St. Peter repeated the prophecy at large, dwelling particularly on the mention made there of never-failing joy and trust in God's presence; the presence, I say, of GOD ALMIGHTY, as the stay of faith in this world, and the fountain of actual bliss in the world to come. All this St. Peter dwelt on, with the view, as it should seem, of forcibly impressing his hearers with the thought of the bliss to be attained by repenting, and believing in JESUS CHRIST.

St. Paul, in like manner, appealing to the Jewish History, and to the testimony borne to our SAVIOUR by the old Prophets, brought forward the same text; but not so as to dwell on it in the same earnest way as St. Peter did. "As concerning that God raised CHRIST from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, HE saith on this wise; I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore HE saith also in another Psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. For David," adds the Apostle, "after he had served his own generation, by the will of GOD, fell on sleep, and was gathered unto his fathers, and saw corruption. But HE whom GOD raised up saw no corruption." St. Paul recites the text more shortly than St. Peter, his object at the time being, as appears, more to refute gainsayers than to win souls. But so it is, that both of them go to the same text, and thereby recommend it to Christians of all times, as one especially worthy to be studied when we are contemplating our LORD's rising again from the dead.

It is much to be observed on what particular circumstance in CHRIST's resurrection the chief stress appears to be laid, both in the Psalm and by the Apostles who mention it. It is this: that His blessed Body saw no corruption. It lay not long enough in the grave for that change to have taken place in it, which we know to be the lot of all human bodies, when they have been any while dead. For it was about the ninth hour, *i. e.* three in the afternoon of Friday, when our LORD poured out His soul unto death on the Cross. And very early on Sunday morning, before Mary Magdalene had come to the sepulchre (and she came while

it was yet dark), our LORD had burst the bands of death, and was risen in His glorious incorruptible Body. On the whole, then, we cannot suppose that HE had been dead more than thirty-six hours; so that it may well be believed that His Body had the privilege of returning to life free from all change and decay. In this respect, a difference was made between it and the body of Lazarus, which had been in the grave four days, and was therefore supposed by his friends to have seen corruption.

There seems, indeed, even to our ignorant thought, an especial propriety in its being ordered, that the only body which was never stained by sin, should also be the only one exempt, though not from the pains, yet from the loathsomeness of death. It was a way of giving the whole world, angels and men, clearly to understand, that although GOD had laid on HIM the punishment due to sinful men, yet HE never ceased for a moment to be the only beloved of His Father. He bore the curse on Adam, as far as the separation of soul and body went; but His soul was not imprisoned for any length of time in the state of separation; neither did His Body literally return to the dust. His soul was not left in hell; neither did His flesh see corruption.

According to the marvellous fulness of Scripture, it will be found that this one short verse, applied, as it is, by the Apostles to JESUS CHRIST, contains in it many great truths, most necessary for our comfort as Christians, and most impossible to be known, had not GOD mercifully revealed them from heaven.

First, it proves most expressly the truth of our SAVIOUR'S human Soul and Body: proves, that as HE took on HIMSELF, really and truly, the substance of our nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and lived and died, in all respects, a man, sin only and sinful infirmity excepted; so also, in His unseen state, HE continued to be a man among men; His divine Soul went where other souls go; His precious Body lay for a while in the grave, like other bodies.

By the care taken to reveal this, we have a token and earnest given us that our merciful GOD sympathizes (if I may say so) with our natural care and anxiety as to what shall become both of our friends and ourselves, during that awful interval which is to come between death and resurrection. We know now, for certain, what is enough to make up for our blindness and uncertainty

about every thing else, that souls departed, and bodies in the grave, be they where they may, are within the merciful care of HIM who is both GOD and MAN. HE cannot fail to provide for them; for HE has HIMSELF gone through their condition, and can be touched with a feeling of what they require, as of all the other infirmities and imperfections of such a frail being as man. This, when it is well considered, is surely every thing in the way of comfort, whether we are fearing the state of separation for ourselves, or mourning it for others, perhaps very dear to us. Provided only we may have reasonable hope that the covenant of our Christian hope is not forfeited, it is surely every thing in the way of comfort, to know that departing is in some sense being with CHRIST;—that it brings the souls of the faithful somehow into nearer communion with HIM, and seals up their bodies, as it were, under His especial protection.

But our comfort, on further consideration, will, perhaps, be found still more distinctly expressed. Observe the difference between the language of the Old Testament, even the most evangelical portions of it, where they speak of the state of the dead, and the language of the blessed Gospel itself, relating to the same subject. David's expectation is, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," *i. e.* in the dark unseen state. It is dark and unseen; that is all he says of it. But when our LORD HIMSELF spoke of it, His word was not "Hell," but "Paradise." His promise to the penitent thief on the Cross was, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with ME in Paradise." Here is a happy and consoling difference between the way of speaking in Jewish, and in Christian times. The considerate among GOD'S ancient people knew that the souls of the righteous must be in the hands of GOD, and that no torment could touch them. But whether they were in an actual state of enjoyment; whether they knew their own happiness, or rather lived in a quiet sleep; this might be matter of doubt, until our gracious LORD made known for certain, that Abraham's bosom is prepared for such as Lazarus, Paradise for such as that penitent, believing malefactor.

Now what the actual blessings of Paradise are, Holy Scripture nowhere explains: but thus much it gives us to understand, that, the holy souls there are with CHRIST, in some sense, so near and so blessed, that St. Paul most earnestly desired to depart thither.

It was better, more for his immediate happiness, to be with his Master in Paradise, than to have such communion with HIM, as even he, St. Paul, enjoyed on earth. He knew well what he wrote; for besides the especial teaching of the HOLY GHOST, he had himself been caught up into Paradise; and found it, not a mere place for taking of rest in quiet sleep, but a place where heavenly thought can be exercised, and heavenly words spoken in such perfection as is unutterable on earth. "He heard there unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Such being the condition of those holy souls, who are under God's keeping in paradise, it is not to be imagined that such a marvellous event, as the Divine Spirit of our blessed REDEEMER coming into that sacred abode, could take place without some great joy and happiness in all that sacred company, who by faith had looked forward to some great and wonderful redemption, but could not perhaps ever imagine any thing so high as was now revealed to them,—a world saved, and the power of the Devil destroyed, by the death of HIM who was both GOD and MAN. In whatever sense our SAVIOUR had said before, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad;" we must needs suppose, that the heavenly sight of gladness was renewed, and made more perfect, when the victorious Spirit of our SAVIOUR entered into the resting-place of the faithful, with the glad tidings of Salvation, wrought by His blood.

And thus, we understand, that in all our holy duties, our remembrances of CHRIST crucified, and risen again, we do in fact hold communion with all the saints of GOD: not only with the saints now living, but also with those which have gone before,—patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, holy bishops, confessors, virgins; whosoever and wheresoever CHRIST has been glorified in them, living and dying, they are all one people in paradise, and one people too with the Church on earth, rejoicing together to see CHRIST'S day, and to welcome HIM "who liveth and was dead, and behold HE is alive for evermore."

For, in the third place, the words of the text intimate, that, how happy and comfortable soever the Paradise of the dead may be, it is not a place of final perfection, but a place of waiting for something better; a region, not of full enjoyment, but of assured peace and hope. For so much is hinted, in that GOD is thanked

and glorified, for not leaving our SAVIOUR'S Soul in that place. It was an act of His mighty power, to whom all things bow and obey, to open for the Soul of JESUS CHRIST the doors of that happy, though as yet imperfect, abode, and to make a way for His final and unspeakable exaltation, by again uniting that Soul to His blessed Body.

Now here is something very apt to raise in us high and noble thoughts of that, which, in one way or another, we are shamefully used to undervalue,—I mean the mortal body of man. Even the SON of GOD, it appears, could not, as man, be made perfect, without the union of His Soul and Body by resurrection, after the two had been separated from each other by death. And such, we know, is GOD'S purpose, with regard to all who shall be glorified through CHRIST;—their bodies, as well as their spirits, are to partake of the eternal reward.

In order, too, to prepare them for it, the very Body of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST is appointed to be received, by faith, in the LORD'S Supper, that it may be, even to our mortal bodies, a kind of seed of an immortal and glorious being. "The last Adam is a quickening Spirit;" out of His very Body goes virtue, to heal and revive the bodies, as well as the souls, of those whom HE accounts worthy to touch HIM.

Whoever will reflect on this seriously, will surely have earnest thoughts arise in him of his own guilt hitherto many ways, in regard both of his own and other men's bodies. Surely it is no light thing, in any way to defile or dishonour that, which the HOLY GHOST has sealed in Baptism to be the vessel of a regenerate soul: nay more, that in which HE HIMSELF, GOD'S OWN HOLY SPIRIT, vouchsafes to dwell, and which our LORD would have nourished to a pure and heavenly life, by mysterious union with His own sacrificed Body. Surely we cannot be too pure, grave, or charitable,—too much on our guard in our dealings with that which is to rise again,—which CHRIST has taken for part of His peculiar treasure,—which HE intends one day to present to His FATHER in Heaven, united to a purified soul, to live for ever. Speaking as the Scriptures speak, that is, after the manner of men, it depends on ourselves—on our own use of our bodies—to confirm or make void this His merciful and heavenly purpose. May His gracious SPIRIT help men to think on these things in time! for undoubtedly

the load of guilt is extreme—far greater than any of us imagine—which they daily heap on themselves by their irreverent usage of the temples of the HOLY GHOST, contradicting, as it were, and working against the especial purpose of CHRIST'S most holy Sacrament.

So much for what the Prophet here teaches, concerning the dealings of ALMIGHTY GOD with the human *Soul* of our REDEEMER in its separate state: now observe what the same Scripture tells us of His *Body*; wherein you will find more and more reasons for that scrupulous purity and charity, of which I have been speaking. “Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption:” these words, of course, relate to our SAVIOUR'S Body only, as the former words had related to His Soul. And see what a title is given to that crucified Body; it is called, in a peculiar sense, GOD'S HOLY ONE: even as the Angel had said to the Blessed Virgin, “The HOLY GHOST shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” Our SAVIOUR'S person was thus holy, because of His most high Godhead, not only dwelling in His soul and Body, but really and for ever united thereto, so as to make one CHRIST, one Person, very GOD, and very Man. Now here the same name, Holy One, is ascribed to His sacred Body as it laid in the grave, three days and three nights, separate from His soul. It was still holy, still united in a mysterious but real manner to the Eternal WORD. When Joseph of Arimathea, when Nicodemus, when the pious women gathered round it, and showed it all affectionate honour, bringing sweet spices, wrapping it in fine linen, reverentially laying it in a new tomb, hewn out of the rock; do not imagine that they were only paying the last honours to a dead saint: whether they were fully aware of it or no, they were religiously worshipping GOD towards that most holy Temple, in which He still dwelt, the Body of the only Begotten Son. When the chief priests and Pharisees, in their spite and scorn, put a guard on that Body, sealing the stone, and setting a watch; and when the soldiers, as it should seem in insolence, with a spear pierced His side; they were not only dealing disrespectfully with the innocent dead, but they were profaning that flesh and blood, which was united for ever to the Eternal

WORD of GOD. Their sin was like the sin of those who behave to the holy Communion rudely or scornfully; as the pious care of the others is an encouragement to all who come with adoring hearts, however imperfect their knowledge, to that heavenly feast. For CHRIST'S Body is there mystically present, as it was present visibly and outwardly in the grave and on the cross: that Body which is called the Holy One, being not only most holy in itself, but also the channel and conveyance of holiness to the souls and bodies of all who communicate worthily. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man but GOD; not discerning the LORD'S Body; not making a due difference between other bread and wine, and this which is verily and indeed the conveyance of CHRIST'S Body and Blood: he is guilty therefore not merely of disparaging a holy part of GOD'S worship, but also of slighting the Body and Blood of the LORD.

Lastly, seeing that even in the grave the Godhead of the LORD CHRIST still abode with His blessed Body; seeing that Body was still GOD'S Holy One, it could not be suffered to see corruption, according to the exposition of St. Peter before mentioned: "GOD raised HIM up, having loosed the pains of death, *because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.*" Why not possible? Because HE was the very SON of GOD. And to whomsoever HE has given power to become adopted sons of GOD, regenerating them by water and the SPIRIT, and nourishing them with His own Body and Blood: although, because of the infection of sin remaining in them, which never was in HIM, they must still expect to see corruption, their bodies will decay like those of other men, as a corn of wheat dies when cast into the earth,—yet there is in them a something glorious and immortal, a seed of a heavenly life which can never decay. Living or dying, nothing shall separate them from the love of GOD which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD; nothing, that is, but their own wilful unworthiness. A most comfortable thought, that GOD has done, and is doing, so much for us; a most grave and awful thought, that all rests now (if one may say so) with ourselves.

Doubtless, many of us would rather choose to be quite certain, positively assured that we never can fall away; but GOD, who knows what is best for us, speaks not after that manner in holy Scripture. HE every where addresses all, even the most perfect



among Christians, as being yet on their trial, as though it were yet but too possible for the best of them to fall away. As men indeed, their bodies must rise again, and as baptized Christians they have in them the seed and leaven, as it were, of a glorious resurrection; but they may stifle that good seed, they may behave so as to force God to raise them, not to everlasting life, but to shame and everlasting contempt. We may fall from God, and we surely shall, if we be not careful to lay our foundation where the holy Psalmist lays it in the beginning of this his Easter Hymn. "I have set God always before me, for HE is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall." As long as we set God before us, as long as we devoutly remember the Presence of the holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, and meekly endeavour to walk as in that Presence; so long we are safe, and no longer.

And who is sufficient for these things? who can walk by so holy a rule without God's special grace? and who dare hope for His grace, without earnestly seeking HIM in prayers, in sacraments, and in all the discipline of His Church? That is the only safe way, for that is the way which God Himself has promised to bless. That is the very path of life, leading to HIM, in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there is pleasure for evermore.

## S E R M O N XLVII.

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### JOY IN CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

*PREACHED ON EASTER MONDAY.*

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PSALM xvi. 10.

“Thou wilt not leave My soul in Hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

WITHOUT all question, this prophecy belongs in an especial sense to our LORD and SAVIOUR. HE it was, whose pure and divine Soul could not stay long in the place of hope and imperfection; whose Body could not possibly be holden of death long enough to see change and corruption. Yet so it is, that almost all the Psalms which relate in this manner to the King and Head of the Church, do also relate, in a merciful and mysterious way, to the Church itself, and to every member of it. We may, therefore, without presumption, go on to consider these heavenly promises as spoken to ourselves and to all who are in covenant with GOD through JESUS CHRIST.

We are particularly warranted in taking this Psalm to ourselves, inasmuch as the first verses of it plainly belong to David as well as to CHRIST. It is David, who so earnestly pledges himself never to run after another god. “Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, neither make mention of their names within my lips.” It is David, who thanks GOD so earnestly, for having given him a portion among His own people, and in His Church. “The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” It will be found on examination that every part of the Psalm may be applied to David in some sense, except that one clause, in which, as both St. Peter

and St. Paul have told us, our LORD only can be meant. "Thou wilt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." The rest belongs to the king of Israel; and to all who like him faithfully serve or have served GOD in His Church, whether before or after the coming of our LORD.

Here then, we may see, first of all, what consolation devout persons had, even under the Old Testament; how they did, as it were, keep a kind of Easter beforehand. We see what happiness it was to holy David, to know for certain that he was on God's side, and not on the side of the idols, and false gods. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, THOU art my GOD; . . . but they that run after another god shall have great trouble. Their drink-offerings of blood will I not offer, neither make mention of their names within my lips." So far, he declares he will have nothing to do with idols; he will not join in their abominable sacrifices, nor will he own them to be gods by swearing in their names. Then he rejoices in his own happiness, in having so good and bountiful a GOD, and being one of His peculiar people. "The LORD Himself is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup: THOU shalt maintain my lot. The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Why was the holy Psalmist so contented, so thankful for his own condition? Not because he was altogether what this world calls prosperous; on the other hand, the next verse shows that he had serious affliction to try him. "I will thank the LORD," he says, "for giving me warning; my reins also chasten me in the night-season:" that is, "I have bodily pain, which keeps me awake: I am thankful for it: it is a warning from GOD for my good."

Observe, next, what use the man after God's own heart made of his nightly pain and sickness. As he lay awake, he practised himself in heavenly contemplation. "I have set GOD," he says, "always before me, for HE is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Wherefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced: moreover also, my flesh shall rest in hope . . . Thou wilt shew me the Path of Life; in Thy Presence is the Fulness of Joy, and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore." To be sure, David here spoke by the spirit of prophecy, and very likely was

far from knowing himself the full meaning of all that he said. Still he could not mean less than this: that he had a fair and reasonable hope of being somehow delivered from the power of death, and made partaker of heavenly joys in the more immediate presence of God.

Such was the hope of holy David and of the other old fathers of the Jewish nation, whether they were patriarchs, prophets, or kings. It supported them in affliction, sometimes in martyrdom: it made their heart glad, and their glory, that is, their tongue, the best member that they had, ready and earnest in praising God: it caused them, even dying, to rest in hope. And yet they, even the greatest of them, only saw through a glass darkly the things which Christians see face to face. How will they rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us for our exceeding inexcusable carelessness, about those infinite blessings, which they so earnestly desire to see, whereas we who have lived among them from our birth act as if we had never seen them!

On the other hand, such as desire and endeavour to offer to God thanksgivings worthy of His Gospel, will find it no small help to know that their unworthy thanksgivings are very far from being single and alone. It is a comfort to know that God's servants of all times, David and Abraham,—the saints before CHRIST, as well as they who have believed since His coming,—partake of our devout joy, and hope of immortality. It makes us the bolder to abide to the end by the only good cause, when we know that no age has passed, in which there were not some who looked up to God in like manner.

These, among other good and consoling thoughts, we naturally have, on merely considering what this our Psalm teaches of the eternal hope of the pious Jews of old. When we go on to repeat the same Psalm more expressly in our own persons, then, indeed, there is no end to the instruction and comfort we may gain from it.

First, we see what kind of persons may reasonably hope to persevere in well-doing, and in God's favour: namely, those who make it a rule to live always as in God's especial presence. "I have set God always before me, for HE is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall." If you want to have a cheerful and rational dependence on your own continuance in well-doing, this one

thing you must do ; you must set GOD always before you. You must never act as if you were alone in the world, as if you were out of His sight, by whom only you are in the world at all.

Especially, being as you are a baptized Christian, you must never act as if you were far away from that Blessed and Holy SPIRIT, whom GOD gives to every child in the Sacrament of his new birth. The HOLY SPIRIT is dwelling in you ; surely it is no hard thing, to call on you for some serious regard to such a noble, august presence. Practise this regard : let the memory of it restrain you from sin : let it encourage you, for CHRIST'S sake, in prayer and in every good work. By degrees GOD will make it the settled habit of your mind and heart ; and then you will be, so far, drawing nearer the nature of Angels, whose happiness it is to be guarded from sin of every kind by the clear sight they enjoy of the HOLY ONE.

This is the only "assurance" of salvation that can reasonably be depended on by any man in his own case : viz. the sober yet cheerful hope which arises from a pure conscience, from long continued habits of real piety and goodness. All assurance besides this is more or less fanciful and dangerous. It too often leads men to praise or value themselves overmuch ; to be negligent of many duties, such as preparing for the communion ; to grow tired of quiet orderly improvement, as though it could give them no more than they have already.

But if a man were really endeavouring to keep on that safe ground of assurance, which was just now pointed out,—reasonable hope, grounded on habitual obedience,—then he might without presumption look for the other comforts mentioned in the Psalm. He might indulge in a calm and reverential joy of heart ; such as David's, when he sang, "Wherefore my heart was glad : " such as that of the holy women, when on Easter morning they saw the angels, and "departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy."

And although such true joy, gladness arising from a tranquil and reasonable hope of GOD'S favour now and for ever, is any thing but talkative, boastful, and familiar, yet it will and must make a great difference in the conversation also of a man, and in the words which he speaks. It is not to be supposed, that the faithful disciples of our SAVIOUR, and the women who followed HIM

from Galilee, had the same looks, tones, and ways of speaking, during the melancholy hours of His departure, while they were in much doubt and perplexity, as they had after they were assured of His resurrection. In the first case, we know, they "walked and were sad," so sad, that a considerate stranger passing by naturally took notice of it: in the other case, whether HE were in sight or out of sight, they "worshipped HIM with great joy;" they "did eat their daily meals with gladness and frankness of heart, praising GOD and having favour with all the people." Now this is what David expresses in the Psalm when he says, "Not only my heart was glad, but also my glory rejoiced."

For what is here called "my glory" means "my tongue," as we learn by the Apostle's explanation of it: "Therefore my heart did rejoice, and *my tongue* was glad." The tongue is called "the *glory*" of a man, because it is in one sense the best member that we have; being that with which we do most immediately and directly praise GOD. The thought, then, of our LORD's glorious resurrection, and of the interest which HE by His mercy has given us, as Christians, in His glory and happiness: this thought, when it has hold of the mind, will naturally move the tongue also, in Church and in all solemn offices, openly and aloud to confess His unspeakable goodness;—out of Church, and every where, to speak evenly and cheerfully of all things; not rashly to discourse of GOD, where such discourse will only cause His Name to be profaned, yet gladly to watch for good opportunities of meditating as it were aloud on His gracious Providence, in company with those who are likely to do us good, or to receive good from us. As it is expressed by one of the Prophets, "They that feared the LORD spake often one to another;" and he intimates that such conversation among *them* was especially approved by the All-seeing Judge. "The LORD hearkened and heard it; and a Book of Remembrance was written before HIM for them that feared the LORD, and that called on His Name."

Next, the Psalmist notices, as another, the greatest of all fruits of holy trust in the ALMIGHTY, that it causes our very "flesh," that is, our mortal body, to "rest in hope:" it makes sleep quiet and secure, and it takes out the sting of death. What can be more utterly helpless than a sleeping body (except, indeed, it be a dead body), considered in itself? What more entirely

safe, more thoroughly in a condition of hope and tranquil confidence, than the same body, considered as under the protection of HIM, who cannot slumber nor sleep?

But undoubtedly, the chiefest of all privileges is to have hope in the grave; hope that through HIM, to whom alone these sacred promises belong of right, our souls shall not be left in Hell,—in that dark unknown condition, to which, before the coming of CHRIST, the name of Hell was usually given. Through HIM, I say, through His only merit, we hope that when we lie down in the grave, our souls will be safely kept in Paradise with the souls of all the faithful departed: and though our bodies must see corruption, sinful as they are, and condemned to return to the dust, yet if they have in them the seed of CHRIST's glorious Body, they cannot perish, though they decay; their parting with the soul will be only in order to a happy meeting.

There needs not now to be any thing forlorn or desolate, in our meditations on our departed friends, or on the condition to which we are ourselves approaching. The unseen region, where the soul is to lodge, is the place where once the Spirit of our SAVIOUR abode, and is therefore under His especial protection, even more than any Church, or place that is most sacred on earth. The graves where Christians lie are also so many sacred abodes, where those who have received worthily the holy Communion of His Body and Blood seem to take their quiet rest; the virtue of that blessed Communion sealing them for a yet more blessed Resurrection. Thus we know how to think of the graves of our friends, and of those which are to be our own. We need not waste ourselves in ignorant and childish bewailings, but calmly and firmly trust them to His care, Whose they are, and Whom they faithfully served.

Of course I do not speak of inconsiderate, irreligious persons. Living and dying, the thought of such must be full of pain and doubt. But where CHRIST's faith has been considerably embraced, CHRIST's law seriously kept, and His Sacraments humbly sought and received, the graves of such persons are surely resting-places, not only for their own wearied bodies, but also for our wearied and restless thoughts, over-busy and over-anxious with the cares and amusements of this present world.

Thus the view of the grave and of Paradise will come tempered and sweetened to those, who by faith set GOD in CHRIST always

before them : and what is more, they will look beyond Paradise and the grave to the very highest Heaven itself. Their faith by degrees will be steadied, to look upwards into the depth of those things, which " eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into man's heart" to conceive. GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT will be with them, to help them in the firm and deliberate contemplation of eternal bliss. They will see more and more of the path of life, will long more and more for the fulness of joy, will practise themselves more and more in learning to love those pleasures, which are for evermore at the right hand of GOD.

But all depends on two things : our setting GOD always before us, and our carefully abiding by His friends, and avoiding His enemies ; according to what is written in the beginning of this Psalm ; " All my delight is upon the saints that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue. But they that run after another god shall have great trouble."



# S E R M O N XLVIII.

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## THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HOLY PLACES.

PREACHED ON THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE CONSECRATION OF A CHURCH.

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### EXODUS XX. 21.

“In all places where I record My Name, I will come unto thee and bless thee.”

THIS is one of the tokens which ALMIGHTY GOD gave to the children of Israel of the covenant which HE made with them. HE had just declared to them from Heaven, “If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, ye shall be to Me a peculiar treasure above all people; and ye shall be unto Me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy Nation.” Then HE gave them those many commandments of different kinds, which you read in the Books of Moses, as tokens of this covenant of His. One of the very first was, that they should make HIM an altar, and set up a special place for worshipping HIM in. HE would appoint them the place, and whenever they came before HIM there, HE would be ready to bless them, provided they did not come with such a bad mind as to put a hindrance in the way of His blessing.

This, then, is the meaning of the promise, containing, in effect, three things:—

1. That there should be places among them, where GOD would *record His Name*, that is, HE would call them by His Name; they should be so many memorials of HIM;—so many tokens to remind them that HE was their GOD, and they His people.

2. That these same places should be also tokens especially of His presence. HE would come among them there in a way different from that ordinary presence of His, whereby HE fills heaven and earth. “In all places where I record My Name, *I will come unto thee.*”

3. That this presence of His, which could not but be awful, because HE is the great and terrible GOD, would be always with a purpose to do them good, if they did not make themselves unworthy of the favour. I will come unto thee, *and bless thee.*

Such was the LORD's promise to His people at the beginning; and all readers of the Old Testament know how faithfully it was accomplished. Wherever the children of Israel were, as long as they were God's people, they never wanted a place where HE recorded His Name. In the wilderness, they had His Tabernacle, which was made according to the pattern showed to Moses in the Mount. In the Land of Canaan, after a time, Solomon was raised up to build HIM a house;—the famous Temple of Jerusalem; itself also planned and ordered throughout by special teaching of the good SPIRIT of GOD; for "all this," says David, giving the pattern to Solomon, "the LORD made me to understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern." And even when they were carried captive, and far away from the Temple, and the Temple itself in ruins, still they had His command and encouragement to worship HIM, and confess their sins toward it. There HE still was to be found, to come unto them, and bless them.

So it was in the former Covenant, among the Church and people of the Jews; and we know that the whole of their services were meant for an example and shadow of Heavenly things, that is, of the kingdom of Heaven, of the Church and people of CHRIST. We know that there were many prophets and righteous men who desired to see the things which we see, and saw them not; our LORD Himself hath declared, that our eyes, the eyes of the simplest child and most ignorant person in the Christian Church are more blessed, more favoured, than the eyes of Abraham, Moses, and David; so much more glorious are the things which we see, than the things which they saw. As this saying of our LORD belongs to the whole of the Law and the condition of the Jews, compared with the Gospel and the condition of Christians, so no doubt does it belong in particular to the Tabernacle and Temple, compared with the Churches in which His good Providence allows us now to record His name. Great and glorious as the Tabernacle and Temple were, there is no question that the highest of those who worshipped in them would

have counted it a mighty privilege, if he could have exchanged that worship for the Holy Service of the Christian Church.

To compare the two more particularly. First, whereas GOD here promises that there should be always places among the Jews where HE would record His name, we see with our eyes how graciously that promise is fulfilled on every side of us. Every Church in the land is a place where HE records His name. For HE has taken it to be His own, by the ministration of His servants, the Bishops, with whom HE has promised to be, in whatever they do in His name, even to the end of the world.

Many of you here present heard no doubt the Prayers and holy Psalms, with which the Bishop, a few days ago, consecrated this place, and made it holy,—made it the LORD'S own for ever. You heard him, how he implored GOD'S blessing upon it, and the services which hereafter shall be performed in it, and how he declared it for ever set apart from all profane and common uses to the honour of GOD'S great Name, and dedicated entirely to His service. Now we are not to doubt, but earnestly and humbly to believe, that in that solemn service ALMIGHTY GOD was present, and took possession of this place to be His own, as effectually as HE took possession of the holy Tabernacle in the wilderness, and afterwards of the Temple of Solomon, by the Cloud of Glory coming down, and settling over the ark in sight of the people, and so filling the whole place. What if HE were out of our sight? what if no overpowering vision nor sound of a mighty rushing wind, declared the glory of His Majesty? By Faith we know and are sure that HE was there, and His glory filled the place: we know it by the promise to His Apostles, just mentioned, “I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” The presence among us, and the blessing, of those who stand in the place of His Apostles, is our token and warrant for the holiness of our Churches, and for His especial presence in them.

This is why we believe, that the most glorious GOD was then invisibly among us, and took possession of this house to be His own. And now I will mention why we believe that HE will still continue to be here, in all congregations, crowded or scanty, which shall ever assemble in this place, on Sundays or on weekdays, to do HIM honour according to the rules of His holy Church. The reason why we believe and are sure of this is, that JESUS CHRIST Himself has declared, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name,

there am I in the midst of them." Now when you are gathered in this place, to use the Church Services, you are sure you are gathered in His Name; because this, as we have seen, is the place which HE hath set apart for Himself, by His servant blessing it. It is as much His peculiar house among the houses of this place, as the Tabernacle was among the other tents in the wilderness, or the Temple among other buildings in the city of David.

This being so, you will easily see the reason why Churches should be made, as far as GOD'S Providence may allow, more glorious and beautiful, even to the eye, than any other buildings; and why, whether beautiful or plain, they should be ever treated with such awful fear and reverence, as becomes the servants of CHRIST in His immediate Presence. They should be made glorious and beautiful, for such reasons as Solomon alleged: "'The house that I build is great, for great is our God above all gods.'" They should be treated with awe, for what Jacob said is true of them: "Surely the LORD is in this place: how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven."

But further: as the presence of GOD in His Tabernacle and Temple was but a shadow of His presence in our Churches, so the several tokens of it in the one, if we will consider them, may be found in greater perfection in the other. There were tokens of GOD'S presence in the structure of the Tabernacle, and in the order of its parts; tokens of it in services performed; tokens of it in the miraculous and heavenly blessings, wherewith the ALMIGHTY did there visit His people. We in our Churches have our tokens, equally sure, and more holy and glorious; and that in all the three kinds.

Thus, the most remarkable circumstance to strike the eye of one looking at the Tabernacle or Temple, was the difference between the holy place and the most holy; the one being appointed for GOD'S ordinary service, the other for the service of atonement, the most solemn of all; and there was a vail between the two. In like manner, the distinguishing circumstance, which, even to the eye, sets apart a regularly built Church, and distinguishes it from other buildings, is the difference between the body of the Church and the Chancel; the one being appointed for the ministration of the Word and Prayer, the other for the most holy Commemoration of CHRIST'S death, and

Communion of His Body and Blood. As CHRIST's presence therefore in the holy Eucharist is nearer and more awful even than in any other service, Christian people have commonly been led to express their faith in it, by making the Chancel, if they could, more beautiful and majestic and awful, than the rest of the Church.

Again, both in the Tabernacle and Temple were Lavers, placed in the way between the entrance of the holy place and the altar, at which those were to wash who meant to partake of GOD's service; a seal of His presence, who requires clean hands and a pure heart, else His worshippers forfeit His blessing. And do we not in like manner see the Font, the place of Holy Baptism, set in our Churches between the porch and the Altar or Communion-table, so that there is no coming to the one without passing by the other? a token, as we know, of CURIST's presence in Holy Baptism, and of the need of being there washed from our sins, and made members of HIM, and of continuing in that purity, before we venture to come near HIM at His altar.

Again, as the whole of the Jewish Tabernacle or Temple had reference to that one most sacred end of it, where was the Mercy-seat, the especial pledge of GOD's presence, itself set upon the Ark of the Covenant in which the Tables of the Law were, and overshadowed by the Cherubims of glory; so the whole of most of our Churches was meant, by those who builded them, to refer to the most holy part, the Chancel; where, as often as the communion is administered, are the tokens of the true Mercy-seat, the Man CURIST JESUS, giving HIMSELF to be, first a sacrifice for us on the Cross, and then our spiritual meat and drink. As the shew-bread was set by the side of the Temple, so the holy bread and wine which are to be offered on the Table of our LORD, are set ready, not on that Table, but where they may be reverently taken and offered by the Priest. As the altar of burnt-offering was put in front of the Ark, so the places where the Priest kneels, to offer the sacrifice of prayer, are commonly somewhere near the front of the Chancel. As in the Ark itself were the tables of the Law, so the Laws of GOD, the Scriptures, are rehearsed to you, and preached on, from the Chancel, and the Commandments are set up, as you know, over the Communion-table. And these are not mere dead ceremonies: if, even in the Jewish service, they were tokens of GOD's presence and blessing, doubt not but that to us

Christians, coming with faithful hearts, they are much more so. Thus, even the order of the parts of the Church may teach us, if we will, many serious and comfortable truths; and wherever we look around, from the crosses on the top of our Churches, to the carvings on the rails and seats, we may see something to put us in mind of HIM to whom all points—because HE is all in all to us,—*GOD* made man, and crucified for our sake.

As to our sacred services, compared with those of the Jews; no one who considers at all can help seeing, both how the one answers to the other, and how ours are far more blessed. If they had the Priests, the sons of Aaron, to bless them in *GOD*'s Name, and offer for them such sacrifices as were then ordained; we have the Priests of the new law, the spiritual sons and successors of the Apostles of *JESUS CHRIST*, those whom HE sent, as His *FATHER* had sent HIM. If they had sacrifices of beasts, and the meat-offering, we have the holy and blessed Sacrifice of that sacred bread and wine, which HE will make to us, if we be not unworthy, even His own Body and Blood. If they had the Law preserved in the Ark, we have the Bible read and preached. If they had the divine Psalms, we, too, have them, and their meaning also,—the very spirit and life of them, *CHRIST JESUS*.

But over and above the forms of the Tabernacle and Temple, and their sacred services, they had certain great miracles, yet more fearful, and, at the same time, more gracious, by way of signs, that *GOD* was there in a manner in which HE was nowhere else. When Moses first set up the tabernacle, having ordered all things in it as *ALMIGHTY GOD* had commanded him, *GOD* took possession of it by a bright cloud, covering the tent of the congregation; and the glory of the *LORD* filled the tabernacle. In like manner, when Solomon dedicated the temple, the priests, we read, could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the *LORD* filled the house of the *LORD*. Thus did the *LORD* fulfil His promise of coming to the Jews, to bless them in every place where His name was recorded: but this glory was as nothing, compared with that which we know fills our Churches,—the presence of *GOD*'s Holy *SPRIT*, blessing *GOD*'s gifts and those who receive them; transforming all into the likeness of *JESUS CHRIST*, in whom all are one.

Again, “when Moses went into the Tabernacle of the Congregation to speak with *GOD*, he heard the voice of One speaking

unto him from off the Mercy-seat that was upon the Ark of testimony, from between the two Cherubims, and HE spake unto him." Thus he learned the words of GOD, "hearing a voice, but seeing no man." Was not this an awful testimony of the LORD being in that place? Yet was it not more awful than we ourselves experience, if we have faith, every time we come into the Church, and hear the counsel of the LORD out of holy Scripture, and the ancient creeds and prayers of the Church of CHRIST.

In both those cases, GOD answers us by a voice;—the lessons which come home to our hearts, come from HIM: if we obey them, it is HIM we obey; if we despise them, it is HIM we despise. The Bible, read and preached in the Church, and the holy Sacraments there administered, are the two great miracles, making these our assemblies more glorious, more full of the Most High GOD, than ever were the places where HE recorded His name among the Jewish people of old. CHRIST was near to them; but to us HE is actually joined. They were His servants: we are His members. And of this astonishing union, these His Churches, set apart for the sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, for instruction in His word, and for the service of His holy Sacraments, are so many sure tokens and pledges.

See then, Christian brethren, what a burthen is laid upon us; a joyful and a blessed burthen, if we will so take it; but who can say how low it will sink us, if we refuse to meet GOD's gracious Providence with serious thankfulness and obedience? I say again, a new Church such as this, is a sort of burthen laid upon the consciences of all who live in the place where it is provided, and who are called therefore by GOD's Providence to take part in His services here. For wherever a Church is, CHRIST, as you have heard, hath promised to come unto His people. He is here to meet you, as often as the Church is open. Do you in earnest believe this? and if you do, can you help perceiving that wilful staying away from Church is an affront to His holy name; it is as much as saying, you do not care to be with HIM, you do not care for His blessing.

And what if we come for custom's sake, just because other people do? What if we come with a careless and childish mind, and when we are here behave disrespectfully? Yet surely it is still true that CHRIST is here: our behaviour makes no difference in that respect, but to us it will make all the difference: we shall

seem to our FATHER and REDEEMER as those who mock; we shall be in GOD'S sight hypocrites and deceivers, and we shall bring a curse upon us and not a blessing.

Consider well then what you are about when you come within this threshold; more especially recollect yourself and be very serious, if you mean to go beyond the outer court of the tabernacle, and entering into the Holy of Holies, to offer yourself at the holy feast of the Body and Blood of the LORD. Consider, recollect yourself: it is no common place: it is a King's court, and the King's servants are around the throne on every side: it is the Palace of the great King of Heaven and earth, and the Angels are around about His altar, filling the temple, as a prophet saw them of old. Will you sit gazing carelessly about, while the blessed Spirits are hiding their faces in terror and amazement at His unspeakable glory? will you not think of GOD YOUR SAVIOUR,—no not even in this place where HE records His name, and at this hour when HE is waiting to bless you?

Remember that His Presence can be no indifferent matter: this village cannot be, henceforth, as if this new Church had never been built; if GOD is not better served here than HE has been, if His worshippers do not try to serve HIM more seriously and more regularly, if the neglecters of His worship do not take warning by such signs of His being here, their account will be so much heavier by and by: they will be in the sight of their Judge and His angels so much more like Chorazin and Bethsaida; the very heathens, if they respect their idol temples, will perhaps rise up at the last day and condemn such indevout Christians.

Let all those again, who seriously delight in this Church, and have taken interest in it, guard themselves against the certain danger of their present feelings passing away; let none of us be contented to admire the beauty of the work, without earnest resolutions to employ it to that purpose for which GOD'S gracious Providence gave it. What is that purpose? That HE might come to us and bless us. HE hath come to us: HE is now, and daily will be, waiting to bless us: and as this place is a figure of Heaven, the holy place of the Most Holy, so His blessing here, if we will but receive it with clean and prepared hearts, will prove but the faint shadow of another blessing, a perfect and eternal one, which HE will pronounce on us hereafter.



# S E R M O N XLIX.

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## EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

*PREACHED ON ASCENSION DAY.*

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PSALM lxviii. 18.

“THOU hast ascended on high, THOU hast led captivity captive, THOU hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD GOD might dwell among them.”

AS GOD ALMIGHTY graciously taught us how to pray to HIM, in the LORD'S PRAYER, so HE had long before set us a pattern how to praise HIM, by the divine songs of the Old Testament, which HE has instructed us, in the New Testament, to apply to His mercies shown us in CHRIST JESUS. Otherwise, so infinite and unspeakable are those mercies, we never surely should have known how to praise HIM for them worthily. We never should have known or thought of a hymn worthy the Ascension of our SAVIOUR, had not the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, by the Prophet David, condescended to provide us with one in that glorious Psalm which is appointed by the Church to be used on Whitsunday: in which, under the figure of the Ark of GOD, carried up to Mount Sion, the praises of our blessed LORD are sung, going up to Heaven as the Head of His Church, and sending down the Holy Comforter, the fountain of all spiritual blessings, to abide among His chosen in His room.

The Psalm, indeed, goes over the whole reach of GOD'S mercies in redeeming His Church, from the beginning to the end; but the most illustrious verse, perhaps, in it, is this, which relates to

our LORD'S ASCENSION: "THOU hast ascended on high, THOU hast led captivity captive, THOU hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD GOD might dwell among them."

Here you may observe the several parts of the great triumph of our suffering REDEEMER, when His glory was made perfect and HE was finally exalted as on this day.

First, there is the simple fact of His ASCENSION: "THOU hast ascended on high."

Next, the effect on His enemies, and on all the powers of darkness: "THOU hast led captivity captive."

Thirdly, the effect on men, even on the worst of men, "the rebellious:" HE received for them the most precious gifts, insomuch that the LORD GOD, the HOLY GHOST, the COMFORTER, was sent down by HIM to dwell among them.

First of all, consider the simple fact of our SAVIOUR'S ascension, by itself: you will find that there is no end to the wonderful and glorious prospect which it opens to the children of men. Here is one who is not ashamed to call us brethren; a true Man, as we are; one who was born like us in all but sin; who underwent the pains and infirmities of childhood, the trials and troubles of mature age, the agony of fear, the pain of desertion, the bitterness of extreme anguish both of mind and body, and the pangs of a cruel death: one who loved us so dearly as to suffer all this for our sakes: here we see HIM, with the eye of faith, exalted to the right hand of GOD, having all power given HIM both in heaven and in earth. HE is gone into heaven, the first of all Adam's children, opening the gates of immortality to all believers. HE is gone into Heaven, the first fruits of a whole harvest of His redeemed; and by that glorious ascension we know something of what is prepared for those who try to ascend thither in heart and mind: we know that nothing possibly can be too high or glorious for faithful Christians to hope for, seeing that HE, who is their pattern and example, is raised to the right hand of the ALMIGHTY FATHER.

When we have thought most highly and gloriously of all that can make man happy, spiritually happy; perfect peace, purity unstained, a will to do all that GOD would have done, and power to act and perform that blessed will, an overflowing

charity to all the good creatures of the ALMIGHTY, and the certainty that we are ourselves beloved by all; above all, the sight of the Most High God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, loving us, and drawing us continually nearer to HIM: and all this sure to persevere and improve for ever, so that when thousands of millions of years are past, those who for CHRIST's sake are so graciously accepted, will be no nearer an end of their happiness than when it first began: imagine as you may all this, and whatever else of joy may be suitable to a pure, holy, Divine soul; and you will be yet infinitely far from comprehending the length and breadth, depth and height, of the promises which are sealed to us by the ascension of our SAVIOUR, and His having all power given HIM in heaven and in earth. We know thereby, that the FATHER of all will not think any thing too good for those who are truly conformed to the image of the only begotten SON. And yet we are content to let our minds and hearts creep on here on earth, full of such low cares and fancies, as if we knew nothing of Heaven, or had no hope of coming to it. God give us better minds, for His merits and intercession's sake, who is now on high pleading for us!

We see, then, that the mere fact of our SAVIOUR's exaltation ought in all reason to lift us, heart and soul, on high after HIM: and when the effect of His ascension comes to be considered, our duty, and the way to accomplish it, is so much the plainer. For HE has overcome our spiritual enemies, and bound the old Serpent in chains. "THOU hast led captivity captive," says the Psalmist: that is, THOU art now like a great warrior, returning in triumph from the field, with a band of captive enemies. And who are the captives subdued by our SAVIOUR? who, but the Devil and his angels, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh, one and all chained as it were to His chariot wheels, and making up His glory and victory.

This gives a fearful notion of what we are in fact doing, when we permit ourselves to forget that we are Christians, serving any lust or unworthy desire, instead of practising those tempers which only can make us fit for everlasting life. We are then taking the wrong part in the great never-ending warfare, between CHRIST and the Power of darkness. We are serving and honouring those whom CHRIST is leading captive, the host of enemies dragged at His

chariot wheels, instead of serving HIM, who with one act of His will could reduce all such enemies to nothing. What can come of such madness, but utter confusion and ruin ere long ?

If, indeed, we could not help ourselves, if we had no power given us to make a better choice, such behaviour were more excusable. But observe what follows next : " THOU hast received gifts for men." What gifts ? St. Paul replies in the Epistle to the Ephesians : they are the manifold gifts of the HOLY GHOST : " grace given to every man according to the proportion of the gift of CHRIST." It is in vain then for any man longer to say, " I meant well, but my enemies were too powerful." How should they be more powerful than your Friend, and never-failing Helper, the HOLY and ALMIGHTY SPIRIT of the FATHER and the SON ?

For of HIM, i. e. of the HOLY SPIRIT sent down by the MEDIATOR, the Psalmist is undoubtedly speaking, in the last words of this astonishing verse : " That the LORD GOD might dwell among them." The LORD GOD, the HOLY GHOST, is personally present in the hearts and bodies of all believers. He dwells in each one of us, as in a temple. The word must be spoken in all reverence, but it may be spoken : What more could OMNIPOTENCE itself do for us, than to send an Almighty Helper to dwell in our hearts ? We may speak thus, for GOD HIMSELF has taught us to do so, when HE asks concerning His vineyard, the Church : " What could have been done more for My vineyard, that I have not done in it ?" Were the most perverse and froward of men left to choose what he would have to help him in goodness, what could he ask for more, than the blessed and sanctifying SPIRIT, for ever present, ready to make clean his very heart, and to purify his inmost thoughts and desires ?

When people are outwardly left to themselves, when they lose their parents, elders, and instructors, by death, departure, or otherwise, and then yield to temptation, and go wrong ; they are ready enough to plead for themselves, that they had no friend near to warn or advise them. But he who will believe and attend to the Scriptures, as interpreted by the Church in the Prayer Book, that man knows that he cannot plead so, for he has always not only at hand, but dwelling within him, the Parent and Elder, the Friend and Instructor, of all reasonable and

understanding creatures. He cannot say that he goes wrong unwarned, who has the wisdom of GOD every ready to warn him.

And, that no Christian man might imagine himself shut out of this great blessing, and entitled to justify his sins through his want of spiritual aid; observe what is hinted of those, among whom the LORD GOD, the HOLY GHOST, sent down by the SON, vouchsafes to dwell. They are not all good and obedient. Very far from it: they are too many of them rebellious. CHRIST "received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD GOD might dwell among them."

The Psalmist might mean the word "rebellious," at first, of the stubborn Jews, who kept tempting GOD, both in the wilderness and in the promised land. "They rebelled and vexed His HOLY SPIRIT," which HE had put within them, and sent to dwell among them: they became discontented, lustful, unbelieving, even in sight of the Cloud of Glory, by which HE showed HIMSELF from time to time over the door of the Tabernacle, checking them for their sins, and telling them the way they should go. Yet HE still abode among them: HE took not away the glory from them: although, as long as they refused to be guided by it, it turned not to their blessing, but to their greater punishment.

In like manner, the New Testament teaches, that GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, the true Cloud of Glory, is given to all Christians in Baptism; but it is at their peril to rebel and vex HIM afterwards. If they do, still they cannot drive HIM away: HE continues among them for judgment and condemnation, if they will not let His gracious Presence conduct them to the mercy which HE meant for them. Not indeed visibly, but yet truly, HE dwells in every one of us as in a Temple, as truly as HE dwelt in the whole congregation of the Jews, by that bright cloud of His, which declared His presence over the Ark.

As baptized Christians, the HOLY GHOST, the Comforter, does truly abide within us. This is too great and fearful a thing to be thought on, if the Scripture of GOD, the Voice of the same SPIRIT, had not expressly made it known. St. Paul, speaking to all the Corinthians, who had, of course, various degrees of grace, and of whom some were far gone in things very contrary to GOD'S SPIRIT; yet, speaking to them all, he says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the HOLY GHOST, which is

within you?" By this we know for certain, that even from rebellious Christians the HOLY SPIRIT does not so depart, but that they still continue under the special curse of defiling God's Temple, every time that by sinful indulgence they abuse their own or others' bodies, or by sinful desires pollute their souls. Over and above the judgment due to those, who break God's general commandment of purity, they bring on themselves a special judgment, as profaners of God's Ark and Temple. And so of all other sins: whatever is contrary to God's HOLY SPIRIT, being practised by a Christian man, is a sin against the Temple, is as if it were committed in a Church, and will draw down a sentence accordingly.

Now then, add to all this the most serious thought of all, namely, that we are not speaking of things at a distance: you, and I, and each particular Christian, is the person of whom these wonderful sayings are written down in the Book of God. You are the person to whom God is revealed in His only SON incarnate; for you CHRIST died; for you HE sits on high, ordering all things both in this world and in that unseen world, so as shall turn undoubtedly to your good, if you truly try to love God. You are the man in whom the HOLY GHOST has condescended, ever since your Baptism, to abide, as in a Temple and Ark of His own. What a thought is this for you to carry about in the daily concerns of your life! what a fountain of humiliation and self-abasing sorrow when you think over the past! what a spring of holy desires and good resolutions, if you have the courage to make them, for the future!

If the HOLY GHOST be dwelling in us, since HE is a pure SPIRIT, and thoughts in His sight are as distinct and as real as actions; then every time you indulge wrong desires—proud, or covetous, or unkind, or lustful imaginations, you are as if you made God's Church a place for actions of the same kind. Who then can remember his own past thoughts, and not be overwhelmed with the mighty sum of his offences committed in this way?

On the other hand, if the HOLY GHOST be dwelling in you, since HE is an Almighty Friend, there is hope even for the vilest: there is encouragement for those who have been most rebellious, to resolve anew and more earnestly, that they will

be such no longer. Therefore, although it is fearful to think of HIM so very near us, considering what sort of persons conscience tells us we must be in His sight, yet we dare not pray as St. Peter once did, in hasty alarm, not knowing what he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD:" rather we pray every day, as the Church has taught us, in the words of the penitent David, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT from me." Cast us not away, though we have deserved the worst, and take HIM not away, though we have so often grieved and vexed HIM by our sins; but for the sake of HIM who is gone into heaven, to plead for rebels and sinners at His Father's right hand, grant, O LORD, that the HOLY COMFORTER may still continue with us on earth, and we with HIM in Thy Church: that what little good remains in us, and seems often ready to die, may be strengthened; and that our evils, great and manifold as they are, may be purged out by Thy grace and help: that when our KING returns from Heaven, we may not be found among "the rebellious."

# SERMON L.

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RESTRAINT THE CHRISTIAN'S BLESSING.

*PREACHED ON THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY.*

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DEUTERONOMY xii. 8, 9.

“Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes: (For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your GOD giveth you.)”

THESE words are part of Moses' last admonition to the children of Israel in the Wilderness. They had just ended their forty years' wanderings, and were on the point of entering on that promised land, which for so long a time had been the great object of their hopes and prayers. He, like a wise and affectionate friend, well knowing the stubbornness of their hearts, and what danger they were in of being spoiled by prosperity; while he speaks to them at large of the blessings of their new home, its corn, wine, and oil, its flowing with milk and honey, the wealth, peace, and glory, which they might expect in it; warns them also, no less carefully, of GOD's constant Presence there, and of the exact obedience they would have to pay HIM, as ever they hoped to enjoy these blessings. He warns them, here in the text, that it would be a great mistake, if they supposed themselves more at their own ease and liberty, as to what they would do, and what they would leave undone, when they were in Canaan, than when they were in the wilderness. He mentions it as one of the advantages of Canaan, that they would have it in their power, and it would be their duty, to live by a stricter and more exact rule there, than they could possibly do, whilst they were moving about in the wilderness. “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do



here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes : (For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your GOD giveth you.)”

Now, there is a striking resemblance between the condition of the Jews, brought safely to the borders of Canaan, and waiting for GOD'S signal to go in and possess it, and the condition of Christians, after our SAVIOUR had made perfect our redemption by His death, and was ascended into Heaven, but before HE had sent down His SPIRIT to make us fully partakers of the blessings of the Gospel. And, accordingly, the Church has ordained this part of the admonitions of Moses to be read at this solemn time ; as most useful towards helping us to judge rightly of the great change, which the coming of the HOLY GHOST has made, both in our blessings, and in our duties.

The blessing, of which it is proposed now to speak more particularly, is that of being more under control—of having our lives and ways more exactly ordered—than as if we were not Christians. We are now come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD our GOD was so long preparing for us ; and therefore we are no longer to think of doing every man what is right in his own eyes. If it might be excusable in Jews or heathens to do so, it does not follow that it is excusable in us.

And therefore the gate, into which we must strive to enter, is called “strait,” and the way which leadeth unto life, narrow. And our SAVIOUR, inviting us to the blessings of the Gospel, describes them as a yoke and a burthen ; easy indeed, and light, yet still a yoke and a burthen.

And this very circumstance HE mentions as a blessing ; as the very reason why, coming to HIM, the weary and heavy laden might find rest : “Come unto ME, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of ME, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

So that it appears, that both the Law and the Gospel, both Moses and JESUS CHRIST, consider it a great blessing, a great increase of comfort and happiness, to be kept under strict rules. The Gospel was more strict than the Law ; and on that very account its subjects were happier. Canaan was a place, where men could not do what pleased themselves, so much as they could in the Wilderness : and it was the more entirely and truly a place of rest.

But now, this way of thinking is by no means the way of the world. People in general like nothing so much, as having their own choice in all things. They account it a burthen, and not a privilege, to be under the government of others. And there is not, one may venture to say, one man in a thousand, who would not rather be rich than poor, for this very reason;—that a rich man is much more his own master, has much more of his own way in choosing how to spend his time, what company to keep, what employments and diversions to follow, than a poor man generally can have.

Again, every one has observed, I might say has experienced, the hurry which children are usually in, to get out of the state of childhood, and to be left to judge and act for themselves. There are few, it may be feared, who have not to charge themselves with some undutifulness towards their first and best friends, their own parents, on this account. Like the Prodigal Son, young persons are too often found so unthankful, as to hurry on the time of separation from their parents, and say, “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me:” as if it were a piece of preferment and happiness, to get away, as early as possible, from one’s father and mother.

Farther: as most of us are, or have been, under authority of some kind, either as servants, or as scholars, or in some other way, we cannot be ignorant how jealous we were of being interfered with by any but our own masters; how unwilling to take advice even from the wisest, lest we should seem to give him a right to direct us; and how impatient of control even from our masters themselves, in matters which, as we imagined, lay beyond their authority. All of us, as it may seem, naturally sharing, more or less, in the temper of that peevish Hebrew, who would not let Moses interfere with him, though it was only as a friend, to save him from a great sin. We put off our best friends with “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?”

But the worst, and, unfortunately, the most common instance of this ungovernable temper in mankind is, our unwillingness to let God choose for us, and our impatience under the burthens He lays upon us. How very commonly does it happen, that the very condition people choose beforehand, the very place they wished to live in, and the persons they wished to live among, being obtained, becomes the ground of continual complaint and vexation. If they

could but change at will, they say, they should like their situation well enough, but now they are tied down to it, they cannot, that is, they will not, help being fretful and impatient.

Yet this very circumstance, of being tied down to rules, and not having the power to change at will, is, as we have seen, reckoned a great blessing, both in the Old and New Testament, both by MOSES and JESUS CHRIST. And the contrary (the having to choose for ourselves, and to do what is right in our own eyes), is spoken of as a great disadvantage. So different is the judgment of GOD from the judgment of men.

It is true, MOSES is speaking of a particular point of conduct ; but we shall presently see, that what he says will apply, just as reasonably, to every other part of our duty, and may serve to show us the benefit of subjection, and not being left to ourselves in any.

He was speaking of the question, where the Israelites should offer their sacrifices and solemn prayers to ALMIGHTY GOD. Whilst they were in the Wilderness, they sacrificed where they would ; but when they should have come into the Land of Promise, his word of caution is this : "Take heed to thyself, that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest : but in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes : there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee."

We may be apt sometimes to wonder, that the Israelites should have so generally disobeyed this easy command, and should have sacrificed as they did in the high places, even in some of their best days ; when GOD had said, "You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem." But if we would look at home, we might find something very like it amongst ourselves. For many men, even now, are rather too jealous of being ordered and directed in their performance of the outward duties of religion. They had rather choose out churches, ministers, and prayers for themselves, than be content and thankful with what GOD'S Providence has appointed for them.

It is a great happiness in our condition, that we need not be at any loss in these respects. We have no reason to doubt that the Clergy are GOD'S ministers, really appointed by JESUS CHRIST to stand in His place, and to bless in His name. We are certain

that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are His Sacraments; the Bible, His word; and the Lord's Prayer, His prayer. We may be more certain than the Jews could be, which side HE would have us take in all doubtful and difficult points of practice. Suppose the question to be between patient suffering and violent and eager resistance; we need not be at a loss for want of a voice from heaven, as the Jews sometimes were. We know beforehand—the New Testament teaches us in every page—how much better it is to submit quietly, than to do ourselves right by any hasty or passionate ways. Or suppose that two ways appear equally reasonable, but that our inclinations and fancy are rather too passionately inclined towards one of them: we may be sure the safer and better way is rather to incline to the other. "For even CHRIST pleased not Himself."

I say, it is a great happiness which Christians enjoy, in being thus over-ruled and guided in every step, and not left to their own ways. It is impossible to consider the thing at all seriously, without perceiving that it is so; unpleasant as we too often find it to own as much, even to ourselves. The advantage is as plain, as when we say that it is good for a child, that cannot stand alone, to have hold of a kind and careful nurse, instead of being left to totter about by itself. It is, in the strict sense of the words, a blessing infinite and unspeakable. It is as great as the difference between what GOD knows and what we know: between eternal, unbounded wisdom, and our frail and short-sighted understanding.

To have this thought steadily fixed within us, will prove, indeed, the greatest of all blessings: both as to our *rest* in this world, and as to our *inheritance* in that which is to come. In whatever counsel and pursuit we are sure we are guided by GOD, that, we are equally sure, must turn out well in the end: and soberly speaking, what can we wish for more? Now (whatever may be said about the ways and means), the issues and events of things, we know, are absolutely and entirely in GOD'S hand; and therefore it very ill becomes us to be careful and anxious about them. Let us leave them quietly to be managed by HIM, who cannot do us wrong, and cannot wish us harm. Do but reflect on the meaning of these words, and you cannot but wish to keep it always in your mind, as an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, against the most tormenting of all the evils of this mortal life; those

which arise from too anxious thoughts about the morrow. Once make up your mind to this most certain truth, That what is right in God's eyes is far better for you, than what is right in your own eyes; and you will have but one care in the whole world: *i. e.* how to please God in making the best use of the present time: a care in which, by His gracious assistance, you are sure not to fail.

But it was further said, that this temper, of not choosing for ourselves, leads directly to our everlasting inheritance in the other world, as well as making sure of our rest and refreshment in this. For it helps us greatly in the performance of our duty, because, in truth, it leaves us nothing else to do. The moment we set our heart on any worldly object, however innocent it may be in itself, that moment we are, in that respect, in more danger than we were before. We are embarrassed, from having set ourselves another task, besides pleasing God. This is of course a snare and a trouble to us, and it requires great help on God's part, and most commonly a painful struggle on our own, to keep out of sin, under such circumstances. To guard against which we must be so far free from passions, as to indulge them no more than we are thoroughly convinced is pleasing to God. In the spirit of St. Paul's wise and kind warning; "This I say, brethren; the time is short: it remaineth that they who have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God endureth for ever." These words of the beloved disciple, St. John, point out to us the great and final blessing of such a temper as has now been recommended: a temper which had rather be under wise and good guidance, than be left to choose for itself. It prepares and trains us for everlasting happiness in heaven. For the very secret of our enjoyment there will be, that God's will shall be ours. We shall behold His works and ways, especially the glory which He has given to His beloved Son our Saviour, and shall rejoice in them, as in so much good done to ourselves, more and more thankfully for ever.

What a beautiful and comfortable thought is this, of the high

and noble uses to which, if we will, we may turn all our worst disappointments—the bitterest thoughts of shame and remorse, which ever come upon us. We may consider them as part of our Heavenly FATHER'S way of breaking us in, as it were, and training us to the desire and enjoyment of His own blessed presence in heaven. They are so many lessons in His school, each intended to make us a little more perfect in that divine art of having the same will that HE has. Look upon your feelings of shame and self-reproach in this way, and you will compose yourself to receive them calmly, however grievous for the time, in cheerful hope that they may prove hereafter, for CHRIST'S sake, the happy means of your amendment and forgiveness.

And if even the bitter thought of our past sins may be accompanied with so much of what is comfortable and hopeful, surely we may well leave it to ALMIGHTY GOD, to do what HE will with us in every other respect. Only let us think over, fairly and seriously, what has hitherto passed in our own life. Let us recollect what we have experienced in ourselves, seen in our friends, heard of in the world, and read in our Bible. We cannot think it over in earnest, without seeing the great evil of being left to our own way, and the security, the comfort, and happiness, of having God to choose for us.

Once possess yourself with this truth, and you will be fit for every condition that God may send upon you. You will be humble in prosperity, because then God seems to leave you to yourself, and this temper has made you very much afraid of yourself. In sorrow you will be cheerful, because then you feel for certain that God does not leave you to yourself. And in all conditions, you will keep up a constant and thankful sense of the presence and providence of the ALMIGHTY GOD—of God our Saviour; in Whom, if we once learn to delight ourselves, HE is sure to give us our heart's desire.

# SERMON LI.

FORGETFULNESS IN CHRISTIANS NO EXCUSE.

PREACHED ON WHITSUNDAY.

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ST. JOHN iv. 26.

“THE COMFORTER, which is the HOLY GHOST, whom the FATHER will send in My name, HE shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

AMONG other ways which careless people have of getting rid of the matter easily, when they have committed sin, one shall sometimes hear them say, They are sorry they did wrong, but really, at the time, the temptation was strong upon them, and they did not recollect that it *was* wrong. Angry and passionate people, for one instance, very often employ this excuse. They seem to imagine GOD cannot be very much displeased with them, if they can but say that what they did amiss was done in a hurry, and without thinking.

But it is worth their considering, very seriously indeed, whether the very circumstance of their being in a hurry, and doing bad things without thinking, was not itself their own fault.

Not to give yourself time to think, whether what you do is right or wrong—this surely is a sort of conduct very unworthy a reasonable being, who knows that it is as much as his soul is worth, whether he use himself to do right or wrong.

And the fact is, that this excuse of doing things in a hurry, together with all others which sinful Christians are apt to plead for themselves, has been completely done away with by that great mercy of GOD in giving us His HOLY SPIRIT, as on this day, to be with us always, and help us to do good.

In particular, no Christian can fairly pretend to plead his having forgotten his duty, and therefore done wrong, after this most gracious promise of our LORD and SAVIOUR in the text, that the COMFORTER, that is, the HOLY GHOST, should not only teach His disciples their duty, if they did not know it before, but should also put them in mind of it, if at any time they had forgotten it.

The words indeed were first spoken to the Apostles, who being to carry through the whole world the message with which JESUS CHRIST had entrusted them, might well fear, if left to themselves, lest they should forget it, or remember it wrong. It was therefore exceedingly merciful and considerate, both for them and us, to tell them beforehand that they would not be left to themselves: that the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, who alone can give man knowledge at all, would be with them continually; so that they should be always able to speak or write down, without any material error, the words of CHRIST, and the truths of His Gospel.

By this promise we know and are sure, that the things written in the four Gospels concerning our LORD JESUS CHRIST, are the very things which HE said and did: and the lessons contained in the Epistles, the very instructions of His HOLY SPIRIT, telling us what we must do to be saved.

Because, however, by the frailty and weakness of our mortal nature, we are in danger of forgetting, either for a time, or altogether, what we once knew perfectly; we also, in some measure, stand in need of a promise like this: though we be not sent out, as the Apostles were, to teach all nations. If they might forget what CHRIST said in their hearing, we also, especially those among us who cannot read, may forget what they have written for our instruction. We have reason, therefore, to think, that our Blessed SAVIOUR in the text was speaking, not to the Apostles only, but to all who should at any time become disciples of His. HE tells them, one and all, that it must be their own fault if they forget His will, any part of it that is necessary to salvation. For HE, in compassion to their infirmities, gave them, when they were baptized, His HOLY SPIRIT, to teach them their duty, and bring it to their remembrance.

But then, in order to be taught, they must be willing to learn. They must steadily make up their minds to do their duty, when



they know it; and they must ask GOD to teach them, with a sincere and hearty goodwill. Then they are sure, upon the word of an Apostle, not to be left in ignorance. For St. James has said, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of GOD, Who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

The true cause, then, of men's forgetting, or being ignorant of, their duty, is their not praying to GOD as they ought. Perhaps they say over some prayers every day; but they do not in their hearts desire the thing they pray for. They say, in the LORD'S prayer, Deliver us from evil. But they do not seriously wish, while they say so, to be delivered from their bad desires and foolish fancies, their worldly hopes and expectations, their false pleasures and profits. Again, whenever they join in the Communion Service, they pray that GOD would incline their hearts to keep all His laws, one as much as another; and would write them in their hearts. But while they say those words, they are perhaps thinking of something else. For all such prayers as these, there may yet be some favourite sin, from which they do not even wish to be delivered. It is no wonder, if men go on in such devotion, all their lives long, and are never at all the better for it. And yet for all this it may be, and is, quite true, that no man, who sincerely keeps asking of GOD to teach him his duty, will ever, in any thing of consequence, be left in ignorance or forgetfulness of it.

Not that Christians are to expect, in answer to their prayers, any thing like sudden illumination or inspiration from GOD ALMIGHTY. This is a fancy of some persons, who do not enough consider the difference between earth and heaven. If ever, by GOD'S great merey, we shall be so happy as to come there, GOD will speak to us as it were face to face, and we shall have no trouble to find out His will. But here, when our sins have put such a distance between us and HIM, we must not expect such favours. We must humbly and patiently do our best, and leave every thing else to HIM: remembering always, that our great business—the purpose for which we are to pray, and live, and do all things—is not to be comfortable here, but safe hereafter.

Although, however, we are not to expect that the HOLY SPIRIT should pour into our hearts any sudden, sensible comfort, in

answer to our most earnest prayers; yet it is easy for us to see, in some measure, how our continually praying for grace should help to keep us continually from sin. We never pray to GOD in earnest, without seriously considering and bringing it to our minds, that HE is with us. If we pray to HIM on a journey, we must recollect that HE is about our path—if in our chamber, that HE is about our bed: in short, wherever we are, we cannot use thoughtful prayer without having it strong upon our minds, that GOD spieth out all our ways. Now although the folly and misery of man is so great, that not even this recollection will always keep a person from private sins, yet no doubt it very often does so. If he still indulge bad thoughts, yet this remembrance of GOD's presence makes them more uneasy to him, and gives him, so far, a fairer chance to repent of them and forsake them.

And hence the saying which I have often heard, that you cannot keep your prayers and your sins together. This would hardly be true, if it were spoken of such prayers as the generality, it is to be feared, are content with. We see and know by sad experience, that men may keep up some sort of prayer, both in public and in private, along with many of the sins which GOD most hates. But that sort of prayer, which in earnest brings with it the remembrance of our MAKER's presence: this, indeed, it is hardly possible to continue for many years, and yet to go on carelessly in what we know will displease HIM. One of the two—the habit of praying with thought, or the habit of sinning wilfully,—must, one should think, wear out the other, in no very long time.

Prayer, therefore, as being a kind of holy meditation, and as bringing the presence of ALMIGHTY GOD continually to our remembrance, is of itself likely to keep a man out of much mischief. But over and above what it is of itself, there is the promise of JESUS CHRIST added to it, that HIS FATHER will give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask HIM: that is, the SPIRIT OF GOD, GOD HIMSELF, will be always at hand, to keep those who pray as they ought from forgetting their duty.

For a Christian, then, to complain, that he cannot recollect his duty in the hour of temptation, is a sort of excuse which only makes bad worse; for it is affronting GOD, in supposing that He is not at hand to fulfil His own promise. A poor man must not complain of being cruelly starved, when he knows he may have

what he wants upon merely asking for it: neither must a sinner plead that he has not grace to think of what he ought to do, now that he knows of the HOLY COMFORTER, who is come to bring all CHRIST'S sayings to the remembrance of His people.

Besides, let us consider for a moment, what sort of things they are, in excuse for which we hear Christian people pleading this sort of forgetfulness. It is not in nice and hard points, but in such plain and necessary duties, as one would think no one could possibly mistake; things in which forgetting is itself a great sin, since it could not happen without a shameful carelessness about right and wrong.

Thus, men wrong and cheat their neighbours, and yet lie down at night with a quiet conscience, and think they have done nothing strange or shocking, because they forget that every Christian is a brother to them; and that in robbing and cheating him they are robbing and cheating a brother.

Now this is a thing which they cannot be excused for forgetting; any more than a mother could be excused, if she had cast off the care of her child, till she forgot that it was her's, and so came to use it unkindly.

Again, Christian men and women allow themselves to indulge wrong desires, and fall into sins, which are not fit to be named among us; because they forget what God has threatened to all such. They do not consider, that by pleasing themselves now with forbidden things, they wilfully give up their bodies hereafter to the worm that never dieth, and the fire that never shall be quenched. They do not call to mind what God's SPIRIT has plainly enough taught them; that it is madness to give themselves up to such things, unless they have made up their minds to dwell with the devouring fire, with everlasting burnings.

Now you see plainly, that such forgetfulness, being altogether their own fault, is itself a great sin, so far from being an excuse for other sins.

Suppose a father had warned his son, very earnestly, not to steal—not to swear—not to tell lies, or any thing else of that sort, which every child knows to be wrong. Would the father take it for a good excuse, if the son did the very thing forbidden, and said he forgot that his father had told him any thing about it?

But if, besides speaking to him earnestly himself, the father

had left a friend to be with his son always, and keep his warnings fresh in his mind: then the excuse of forgetting, which would be foolish enough in any case, would be a much more wicked and undutiful mockery.

Now, this is just the case with Christians. They have not only the commandments of JESUS CHRIST, to let them know His will; but they have His SPIRIT also abiding with them, like a friend whom HE has trusted, to put them in mind continually, when they are tempted to do amiss.

We may very well judge, then, what sort of an answer GOD ALMIGHTY will make at the last day, to those Christians who plead forgetfulness, when, if they would, they might have had grace to call upon HIM in all temptation. And HE is never far from those who call on HIM in good earnest.

In like manner, almost all the excuses, which ill-minded Christians employ, to keep themselves easy in their sins, are done away with, when it is once known, that the HOLY SPIRIT is among us; as we are taught by His wonderful descent upon the Apostles as on this day.

We cannot now lay upon our corrupt nature the blame of what we do amiss; since, however bad that may be, GOD HIMSELF is at hand to cure it, if we will apply to HIM.

We cannot say, it was all bad example; since here we are assured of the assistance of the HOLY GHOST, to turn our thoughts from the base and evil things we see around us, to the pure and blessed conversation of good men in times past, or of angels in heaven.

We cannot say, it was too much to expect from weak mortals, that they should resist the enticing customs of the world, when we consider what power and support it is, which we have given us to lean on—the power and support of the SPIRIT of GOD, GOD HIMSELF.

In short, when once a man believes, after a Christian manner, in the HOLY GHOST—believes that he, however poor and mean, is yet, *as a Christian*, the Temple of GOD, and has the SPIRIT of GOD dwelling in him—from that time all excuses for sin are taken away, and it becomes indeed, as St. Paul calls it, most exceeding sinful. It becomes like the rebellion of those Jews, who cried out against God and Moses, while the cloud was overshadowing the Tabernacle in their sight,—or like the sin of Balaam, who

went on in his covetousness—when he saw the Angel of the LORD with his sword drawn in his hand.

If people will disobey God wilfully under such circumstances, we have great reason to believe they would disobey HIM in heaven itself, as the Devil and his angels did; and therefore they can no more reasonably expect to come to heaven, than the fallen angels can expect to return thither.

Such is the awful, but most true notion, which the Church to-day would teach to every Christian, concerning wilful sin and forgetfulness of God, when found in any soul that has been baptized, and that has received, of course, the grace of the HOLY GHOST.

It is no wonder, then, that the Devil should always have done his best to root this doctrine out of the minds of God's people; to make them forget, if possible, that the SPIRIT of God dwelleth in them. And sad experience shows, that it is but too possible, nay, easy for him, to keep such thoughts out of men's minds, that they may the more freely indulge themselves in their sins.

For can any one think, that such sort of Christians, as one commonly sees in the world, have really any serious consideration of God's HOLY SPIRIT, as dwelling in them, and being in them? They could not be so easy in their secret sins—could not so composedly go about to defile themselves with all sorts of base pleasures, if they really laid this truth to heart;—that they are doing all this, not only in sight of their God, but while HE is, as it were, speaking to them expressly, and coming close to them, to hinder them from such sins.

It is, therefore, the purpose of our adversary, the Devil, to prevail upon us either to neglect this truth altogether, or to think of it amiss: as though the gift of the SPIRIT were partial, and as if (though HE may have come to some Christians in this particular way) HE had not come to us; in which case, we persuade ourselves we have less to answer for.

This being the purpose of Satan, our purpose, of course, must be just the contrary, if we would save our souls. We must hold fast the doctrine of the Catechism. We must believe in God the HOLY GHOST, who sanctifies us and all the elect people of God, all Christians whatever; and believing, we must do all our best, that we receive not the grace of God, His last and greatest favour, in vain.

## SERMON LII.

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GRACE WELL USED ATTRACTS MORE GRACE.

*PREACHED ON MONDAY IN WHITSUN-WEEK.*

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PSALM cxix. 55, 56.

“ I thought upon Thy Name, O LORD, in the night season, and have kept Thy law. This I had, because I kept Thy commandments.”

WE know, by more than one expression of our divine LORD and MASTER, that there is a sort of character, which, though it cannot entitle men to receive the Gospel, yet prepares and fits them for it. No man can possibly deserve so great a mercy : but some by GOD’s grace are worthier to have it than others are.

So JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF teaches, where HE says, that “ no man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of GOD.” As much as to say, that the temper of mind which disposes men to be content with mere beginnings and good intentions, will never agree with the resolute self-denying spirit, which they had need have in them, who mean in earnest to take up their cross and follow CHRIST. Upon which it would seem to follow that the opposite disposition—the mind which urges men to be constant, steady, persevering,—does on the contrary tend to make a man fit for the Kingdom of GOD.

To the same purpose is the well-known and most gracious declaration concerning little children, “ of such is the Kingdom of Heaven :” it is prepared especially for trusting, affectionate minds ; for those who cling fondly to their friends and parents, and love in every thing to resign themselves up to them, instead of pretending to choose in all things for themselves : to such

the Gospel of CHRIST is especially suited, and they in a manner are suited to it.

By these two instances (to mention no more at present), we learn this lesson concerning the Heavenly Gift, in acknowledgment whereof this holy season is appointed—the indwelling of the HOLY COMFORTER in the souls and bodies of believers, which is sometimes called the Kingdom of God:—concerning this best gift, I say, we learn from such sayings as have been now mentioned, that although the grace and mercy of the HOLY GHOST is indeed free, all-powerful, sovereign,—“blowing,” as our LORD said, “where it listeth,”—there is yet a certain frame and temper, certain habits of conduct and behaviour, a certain disposition and preparation of heart and mind, which is likely, if not sure, wherever it is found, to draw down God’s further blessing on him who has it. It is itself the good gift of God; and it prepares the way for other and better gifts.

There are sundry examples of God’s dealing with His people of old, which tend to confirm this account of our LORD’s meaning. Abraham pleased God, by following at once the voice which called him to leave his own country; and God rewarded him, by giving him grace to be willing, if need were, to sacrifice his son in obedience to the same voice.

Moses showed a loyal and devout spirit, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, and boldly interfering when he saw God’s people oppressed: and God rewarded him by making him their great Prophet and Leader out of Egypt.

Samuel showed himself a considerate and dutiful child, and God called him to bear the burthen and the strife of the people of Israel, in very trying times. David, as a youth, was remarkable for courageous trust in the MOST HIGH, for kindness and generosity towards men, for boldness and fervent zeal in doing the duty of his calling; and he came to an exceeding height of thankful devotion, so that his Psalms are the Church’s treasure of praise, and he is himself known constantly by the name, “the man after God’s own heart.”

And perhaps it might be truly said, that the verse which I just now read to you out of the 119th Psalm, contains in it the rule or principle (as one should call it, speaking as a man) whereby God vouchsafes to order, as it were, His own doings, in encouraging

generally the faint beginnings of goodness. "I thought upon Thy Name, O LORD, in the night season, and have kept Thy law. This I had, because I kept Thy commandments." Keeping the commandments, as has been well said by a wise and pious Bishop of our Church, is rewarded by keeping the commandments. Because the Psalmist had so much piety in him, as in a general way, all day long, to do what he knew was God's will; therefore God gave him, as Job says, "songs in the night." He poured into his heart grace to think on His Name, to be full of holy meditations, in the night-season, when few can any how serve Him. He enabled him to keep His law, during the hours which seemed most unlikely to have allowed a chance of such a sacrifice. Thus the Psalmist went from strength to strength: and thus in all the saints of God, a lower degree of grace and obedience, faithfully improved, is constantly rewarded by a higher one.

Now this rule and law of God's working is wonderfully illustrated by the manner in which the Gospel was first made known to the Gentiles, and the door of the Kingdom of Heaven thrown open, by the extension of the gift of the HOLY GHOST to them also. This we read in the history of Cornelius, part of which is the epistle for this day. No one, with ever so little thought, can help perceiving what great encouragement that history gives to all endeavours to be good, be they but sincere, however faint and imperfect. With this view one may gather, as it were, into one, the several particulars related of him: the many disadvantages under which he served God; the sort of service which he rendered; how he was employed at the very time the gracious offer was first made him; how he improved that offer; with what special favours, one after another, it pleased God to crown more and more his faith and devotion. I will say a few words on each of these heads more particularly.

First, We see the sort of person whom the LORD delights to honour, when we look at Cornelius's condition, and observe under how many drawbacks and difficulties, the like of which are too commonly found enough to discourage almost any one, he contrived (if I may so speak) to be an acceptable worshipper. He was not a Jew, but a Gentile; not one of God's people, but a heathen. Who can express the amount of this disadvantage? It may be comprehended, in some degree, by considering, how much we think



is said in excuse of any particular sin a man falls into, if it can be truly stated of him, that his friends and parents were little better than heathens, and he was brought up such altogether. When this can be said, it is generally thought to go a good way towards apologizing for the errors and vices of any one. How much more in the case of a real heathen, brought up altogether as such, and only thrown among Jews, by God's Providence, as a soldier serving in their country, and at a time when they were so very degenerate, full of hypocrisy and iniquity!

Again, Cornelius was a soldier; a pursuit and way of life, not thought in general particularly favourable to the exercise of true devotion. He was a soldier in the Roman army, a set of persons remarkable for pride, and for contempt of all but their own will and pleasure.

Yet even this person, being stationed by the will of God among His own nation, the Jews, within reach of the Holy Scriptures and of the Temple Worship, was so impressed with the truth and goodness of the Law and Service of the Eternal God, that although it does not seem as if he had become a regular proselyte, he yet devoted himself to the worship of the Most High; he became a devout man, and used himself to serve God with all his house; giving much alms to the people, that is, to the Jews, (whom most Romans so greatly despised,) and praying to God always.

This leads us to say something, secondly, of the sort of service which ALMIGHTY GOD is likely to bless and approve, in persons unfavourably situated, as Cornelius was.

First, he was a devout man; that is, one who cherished in himself the holy and reverential thoughts, which came from time to time into his mind; and which, though he could not as yet know or dream of such a thing, were the godly motions of that good SPIRIT, which was preparing to come down and regenerate him, dwelling within that heart which showed itself so ready to obey His calls from a distance. Cornelius was a devout man, and lived in a sense of God's presence.

The next thing told of him is, that he served God with all his house. He did not, as some do, think it enough to have pious wishes in his mind; according to the expression which I have heard more than once, when people were called to account for their open neglect of religion: I have heard them say, "Ah, nobody

knows what good thoughts I have secretly in my heart." Cornelius did not so: he felt that merely wishing is nothing, and therefore he took care to serve GOD openly in his house: he strove to make his servants also religious. No doubt he brought on himself the wonder, and sometimes the laughter, of his associates in the Roman army; but still he went on praying himself, and teaching and encouraging his servants to pray.

Does not this teach us something, as many as live in a Christian country, and yet suffer any slight excuse to hinder them either in their own regular prayers, or in seeing that their families pray, morning and evening? And is it not the greatest encouragement to those, who put up with some little inconvenience, for the sake of securing a few minutes, for the daily sacrifice of prayer and praise to the MOST HIGH, in their own households, if they cannot attend His Church?

Observe, I say, the daily and regular sacrifice; for this, in particular, is noted of Cornelius, that he prayed to GOD, not by fits and starts, but always. He was glad when they said unto him, "Let us go into the House of the LORD: let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the LORD our Maker." He was not, as we too often are, glad to have been to Church in the morning, because we think ourselves thereby excused from going in the afternoon. But, as it is recorded of a good and holy man of our own Church, and not far from this very neighbourhood, two hundred years ago, "he would have rejoiced to spend his life in that place, where the honour of his Master, JESUS, dwelleth." "He prayed to GOD alway;" that is, he never missed, if he could help it, the occasions and opportunities of solemnly worshipping HIM.

And he added to his prayers both Alms and Fasting—the two wings, as they are called, of Prayer. "He gave much alms to the people," preferring in his bounty those whom he had cause to think GOD preferred: according to the rule of St. Paul: "Do good unto all men, especially to them which are of the Household of Faith."

This was the general course of his life, under all his disadvantages. And to mark especially GOD's approbation of it, observe how he was employed at the very time the Angel came to him. He was keeping a solemn fast on a certain day, having taken nothing until the ninth hour, that is, until three in the afternoon;

at which time he set himself to pray the appointed service, which God's people used at that hour in His house: for the ninth hour, that is, three in the afternoon, was one of the regular hours of prayer, constantly observed among the Jews, and afterwards also among the Christians.

Such was Cornelius's employment, when an Angel of God stood before him; called him by his name; assured him (O unspeakable reward for a whole life of self-denial!) that his prayers and his alms had gone up for a memorial before God; and told him where and to whom he should send, to receive instruction as to God's purpose of grace;—and not only instruction, but admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven—the HOLY SPIRIT coming down to dwell in his heart. And these blessings he was to receive, not for himself only, but, as the first of believing Gentiles, for all who from all quarters of the world should come in, and give their names to be servants of CHRIST. And to make the favour still more signal, the HOLY SPIRIT at the same time instructed St. Peter, by a wonderful vision, that it was His will to break through, in the person of Cornelius, the partition wall which had so long separated the Gentiles from the people of God. And besides all this, when the Apostle had come and had spoken to Cornelius and his family, and they (as they had no other thought) were listening with humble and obedient and believing hearts, the HOLY SPIRIT Himself, in His visible signs, fell on them that heard the word; they began to speak with tongues, and to magnify God: and thereby St. Peter felt quite sure, that the Divine SPIRIT had chosen them for His inhabitation, as entirely as those who had before been called to be Christians from among the Jews: and no time was lost in baptizing them, that they might be regenerate, and have the SPIRIT not only prophesying by them, but dwelling in their hearts, and uniting them to JESUS CHRIST.

Such is the rich, the unspeakable, inconceivable encouragement, which this history of the calling of Cornelius offers, to all who humbly endeavour to serve God under great worldly discouragements: setting out (as one may speak) from the spot whereon they now stand, favourable or unfavourable; and trying to keep themselves, by prayer, by fasting, and by works of kindness to their brethren, alive and open to the influences of the HOLY SPIRIT.

It is a part of Scripture particularly meant for those, who for various reasons think Religion nearly out of the question for *them*; for those who are very destitute and ignorant, living perhaps on the charity of others; for those whose whole time seems engrossed, by hard work or by troublesome trade; who are made anxious by their families, or by the state of their health:—to all such the Word is gone forth, if they will but have the heart to receive it: “God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation,” every condition, under every sort of disadvantage, “he that feareth HIM, and worketh righteousness,” will surely be accepted of HIM.

And when HE says, “accepted of HIM,” it is no ordinary blessing that HE speaks of, but it is the crown and sum of all blessings, the justification of a Christian man. It is that which our LORD promised when HE said, “If a man love ME, he will keep My words, and my FATHER will love him; and WE,” *i. e.* the FATHER and the SON, by the SPIRIT, “will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.”

# S E R M O N   L I I I .

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CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, TOKENS OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE.

*PREACHED ON TUESDAY IN WHITSUN-WEEK.*

ST. JOHN x. 9.

“ I am the door : by ME, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

PERSONS who attend to the Church Services must have observed, that the Lessons, Epistles, and Gospels for Whitsun-week, especially those of this day, are selected in some measure with a view to the ministerial office, and to the doctrine of Holy Scripture concerning it. Yesterday's morning Lesson, from the first Epistle to the Corinthians, about the manifestation of the same SPIRIT by variety of gifts ; and also the evening Lesson about the seventy Elders of Israel, who received a gift of the SPIRIT to assist Moses, have both of them an evident reference to that subject. So has one of the Lessons for this morning, beseeching Christians to know those who are over them in the LORD, and admonish them, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. But most especially is this the case with the Epistle and Gospel of the day ; the Epistle giving an account how the HOLY GHOST was given, and could only be given, by laying on of the hands of the Apostles ; the Gospel pointing out those Apostles, as the persons trusted by the Chief Shepherd with the whole care of the sheep.

Nor are there wanting good and plain reasons, why this particular subject should be so much in the Church's mind, at this particular time.

First, this is, as you know, one of the Ember weeks ; next Sunday, the Sunday of the Most Holy Trinity, is one of the

Ordination Sundays. We are therefore to fast and pray for a blessing on those who shall be ordained. And that our fasting and prayer may be accompanied with worthier notions of the blessings we seek, it is well we should be reminded of certain portions of Scripture, telling us shortly, but very seriously, wherein lies the true greatness and sacredness of the ministry of JESUS CHRIST.

It is not that this ministry is sanctioned by the law of England, rather than any other, to instruct, and warn, and guide us: it is not that the same ministry always was, and is still, a mighty instrument in God's hand, for all the best works that have been done in the world; it is not for the love of peace and order, knowing there must be some ministry in the Church, and thinking it best to hold by that which is established. These are all reasons of more or less weight; but neither in each separately, nor in all taken together, can they be truly called *the* reason, why the ministry is so very great and sacred. *The* reason is, that CHRIST only is the door of the sheep; that our spiritual life entirely depends on a real, though mysterious, union with HIM; to which union the ministration of the Apostles, or of others ordained through them, is, ordinarily speaking, quite necessary.

This being so, all the reasons which would otherwise make us to be greatly concerned for the well-being of CHRIST'S ministry among us, are unspeakably heightened, and made more important and more affecting. And, of course, no more serious introduction to hearty prayer for Bishops and Priests, and Deacons, could have been contrived, than the reading of some of those Scriptures, which openly affirm these great things concerning the ministry of those whom CHRIST sends, as HE has sent those Three Orders.

But again, this subject of the Christian ministry is connected very closely with the blessing of Whit Sunday,—is indeed a material part of that blessing. For by that ministry the blessing is continued down to these, and to all times. It was to the Apostles that the HOLY SPIRIT visibly came: through them the promise was made to the Church, that HE should abide in us for ever; and therefore, if there were now no successors of the Apostles in the world, that promise would seem to have become a dead letter, to have passed entirely away from us. But thanks be to ALMIGHTY GOD, that is far from being the case.

For as in the first days of the Church, the visible gift of the HOLY GHOST to the Apostles and some other Disciples, was the external token, to the very senses of men, of His inward presence and abode in their hearts; so now the presence of the Apostles themselves, by their successors,—the Bishops principally, and under them the Priests of the Church,—is a like external token, addressed also to the senses, of the same SPIRIT abiding in *our* hearts also. The Apostles knew for certain, that the promised COMFORTER was present in their ministrations, to regenerate His people first, and afterwards to strengthen and refresh them; because they saw the fiery tongues, they heard the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, they felt the power in themselves to speak with new tongues, and to work various miracles besides. We, in like manner—the word sounds a bold one, but I verily believe it is no more than Scripture plainly warrants us in affirming—we are sure that the same HOLY SPIRIT is present also in our ministrations, for the same gracious purposes: we are sure of it, because we know that the hands of those whom CHRIST commissioned for that purpose were solemnly laid on our heads, and the same commission, in part or in whole, given to us. So that we, as Bishops or Priests, do really stand in the place of the Apostles, and the Word spoken to them is spoken to us.

Thus we see there is a double reason why Scriptures relating to the Ministry and the Succession, should be read in this week particularly:

First, to assist our prayers for those who are shortly to be ordained:

Secondly, to remind us, that through this ministry we have our portion in the precious gifts, brought from heaven by the HOLY GHOST.

This ministry is, in part, the token and the mean of the continuance of the indwelling SPIRIT in the people of GOD. It is our pledge, that we enter in by the door; according to that parable of our LORD which forms the Gospel for the day. As in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are instructed, that the only entrance into the Holy of Holies is through the veil, that is, the flesh of our LORD:—we must be new born, and made members of His Body, (which, as the Catechism teaches, we are in holy

Baptism,) before we can be said to belong to His Church and Kingdom :—so here, in His own parable, the Church is the sheep-fold, and our SAVIOUR is the door. It is only through HIM we must pass, if we would go in and out, and find pasture. No irregular ways, no ways of men, whatever good they may do us in other respects, will admit us to the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of CHRIST.

It is much to be observed, that our LORD distinctly represents HIMSELF as the door, by which both shepherd and sheep must enter. He that climbeth up some other way, is a thief and a robber : he only that entereth in by the door, is the shepherd of the sheep. This is the leading idea of the parable.

And to give the key for explaining it, HE adds afterwards, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep . . . I am the door : by ME if any man come in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” By which it would seem, that it is quite as necessary for the shepherds, in their peculiar office, as it is for the sheep of the flock, to enter in by the door. There must be some peculiar token and mean of grace, sealing the ministers of CHRIST for their office, by immediate communication with HIMSELF, like as there must be the Holy Sacrament of Baptism, to seal every Christian for spiritual union with CHRIST.

This is what we should expect by the parable : and so in fact it has ever been in the Church. Men enter into the fold of our LORD and SAVIOUR, as sheep, by Baptism ; as shepherds, by Ordination. In both cases through HIM, as the door.

Should it be said, by way of answer to this, that too many of those, who are duly ordained, have in all ages neglected or abused their privileges, and some have behaved rather like thieves, who come on purpose to steal, and to kill, and to destroy :—and should the question be asked, as it sometimes is, “Are we to call these bad men shepherds, merely because they have been ordained, and deny the name to good and charitable teachers, merely because they have not been ordained ?”—the answer to this may be perceived, on well considering our LORD’s way of speaking, concerning the sheep of His flock themselves. “By ME if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” Yet we know that too many of those, who enter in by JESUS



CHRIST, being baptized in their infancy, and so made members of HIM, do not continue in that salvation: they neglect it; they receive GOD's grace in vain; they refuse to go in and out, and find pasture; to walk quietly in the way of righteousness, and beside the waters of comfort: and yet all the while our Blessed LORD's saying holds true concerning them also: they were saved, but they have forfeited their salvation.

Thus HE speaks of the sheep; and the like turn may with reason be given to His account of the shepherds. "HE that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To HIM the porter openeth, and the sheep hear His voice, and HE calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out: and when HE putteth forth His own sheep, HE goeth before them, and the sheep follow HIM, for they know His voice." This is the account of the natural and intended effect of GOD's calling a man to be a shepherd and Bishop in His Church; but it may be forfeited as the baptismal privileges may: and yet this will no more interfere with the reality and necessity of CHRIST's call by ordination, than the bad lives of too many Christians interfere with the necessity of Holy Baptism, and the reality of the grace then given.

If the ministers of CHRIST are unworthy, and do not their duty, let them look to it: but still they cannot unordain themselves: they are yet ministers of CHRIST, and the sacraments of our LORD, the tokens and means of our union with HIM, are continued among us through them. Their going wrong does not destroy their commission, nor do away with the spiritual and heavenly state of things, of which their being among us is a token: it does not turn the Church into the world, the new Heaven and the New Earth into the old Heathen or Jewish condition; it still leaves on every Christian the full burthen of his baptismal promises, and of those high and unspeakable privileges, which were sealed to him at the holy Fount of Regeneration. It still leaves him a member of CHRIST, a child of GOD, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven; bound by solemn oath to renounce what GOD hates, to believe what HE teaches, to keep what HE commands.

Such is the view which our LORD's parable of the sheep-fold, compared with what we read elsewhere in the Bible and Prayer Book, generally would lead us to take of our own condition, so far as it

depends on the presence of an apostolical ministry among us. Whoever truly believes it, and lays it to heart, will find that it will make an extreme difference in all his notions and conduct on Church matters.

I do not mean simply in keeping him from schism, and from any proceedings within the Church in the spirit and temper of schism; that is, of self-confidence: but I mean, particularly, in respect of those who really love the Church, and wish to obey it; who desire and endeavour to walk conscientiously in all Church duties and ordinances. If such persons will use themselves to consider this outward Kingdom of GOD as a pledge of the inward, the ministry and Sacraments as sure tokens of the FATHER and the SON dwelling in their hearts by the HOLY SPIRIT; surely that is a way of thinking, which will in an unspeakable way ennoble and purify all they do, both in the Church and elsewhere; all their wishes, prayers, and performances.

Particularly in regard of devotional duties, and Church services, it will not so much set men on any new practices, as it will put their old observances on new and high ground. Thus in our dealings with CHRIST'S ministers, more especially with His Bishops, when any come near us, we shall be full of awe, considering them as living and visible tokens of HIM, under whose Cloud of Glory, though we see it not, we live: we should receive them, as the Galatians are praised for receiving St. Paul, "as an angel of GOD, even as CHRIST JESUS."

In our thoughts on public matters, and what is called the union of the Church of GOD with the State in which we live, we should look chiefly, not to the visible and immediate good done, but to the great duty which lies on the kingdoms of this world, to bow themselves down to the Church and Kingdom of our LORD, and to offer up all their power and glory, as a sacrifice, through her, to GOD.

In our use of the Prayer Book we should remember, that this also, coming down, as it does in a great measure, nearly from the day of Pentecost, is, like the apostolical ministry, a sure token of GOD'S wonderful presence in our hearts; far more, therefore, than any other set of prayers and lessons, however good and edifying, could be.

Finally, this view, if we will steadily try to act on it, will guide

aright, and lift on high, the whole course of our outward religion, both in word and deed. It will help to make us feel, after our measure, that CHRIST is not only the SAVIOUR of all men, one for all by His precious death on the Cross, but also a SAVIOUR, a present and abiding SAVIOUR, to each of us at every moment, by His SPIRIT inhabiting our souls and bodies. It will make every day Sunday, and Sunday like one of the days of eternity. It will make every place a Church, and the Church a kind of Heaven.

## SERMON LIV.

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WHY THE WITNESS OF GOD IS REJECTED.

PREACHED ON TRINITY SUNDAY.

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ST. JOHN iii. 16.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen, and ye receive not Our witness.”

THESE are the words of the eternal SON of GOD, describing the manner in which HIS witness, and the witness of HIS HOLY SPIRIT, would be too generally treated in the world. That behaviour, HE says, would be boldly practised towards HIM, which men can least endure when practised towards themselves. His positive declarations would be treated as falsehoods: His words of earnest advice and warning taken no more notice of, by many, than if they had never been spoken at all.

Now, men know what they feel when they are used in that way, even by those who are as wise and as good as themselves. They cannot very soon forget or pass it over. How then can they think, without trembling, of behaving in the same disrespectful way to the ETERNAL FATHER, to the JUDGE of Quick and Dead, to the ALMIGHTY SPIRIT, in Whom they and all creatures live, and move, and have their being?

They cannot suppose that GOD ALMIGHTY is, as it were, too high above us to care how we behave towards HIM. For HE has warned us in so many words, “Them that honour ME, I will honour; and they that despise ME shall be lightly esteemed.” That is, they who turn their thoughts, seriously and humbly, to the Message of their GOD, brought from heaven by His SON CHRIST JESUS, and sealed afterwards by the gift of His HOLY SPIRIT; those HE will always bear in mind;

they will find HIM a kind and merciful GOD; they will have His blessing both in this world and in the next. But on the other hand, "surely HE scorneth the scorers:" they who will not remember HIM, will find themselves left without HIM in the world; and how then can ever anything turn out well and happily to them?

Neither can the scorers of the ALMIGHTY pretend, that the things which HE teaches, and they refuse to hear, are such as do not nearly concern themselves. On the contrary, the witness of the SON of GOD, the Gospel, of which HE speaks in the text, contains in it all the particulars, on which depend the life, being, and happiness, of every one, both here and hereafter.

Can any thing possibly concern you more than to know, that you have an immortal soul, a living spirit which never can die, and a body which will rise again after death, never more to return to corruption? And farther, that GOD HIMSELF has prepared for this soul and body of yours a home of everlasting peace and joy:—things more blessed than eye ever saw, or ear heard, or than ever entered into man's heart to conceive? These truths, by His Gospel, our SAVIOUR brought to light. Before HIM, they might be darkly guessed at by a few good and wise men: now they are known for certain facts by every child in a Christian country. Can you, dare you pretend for a moment, that the certain knowledge of these things makes no difference to you? Can you, dare you say, you have any excuse for running after wild and low pleasures, in order to drown the cares and sorrows of the world, now that your MAKER has made known to you a place of eternal comfort and recompense? Can you, dare you plead, when vexed and disappointed, that you "do well to be angry, even unto death," now that your eyes are divinely opened, and you have it in your power, if you will, to look on, over a very few years, to a place where "there will be no sorrow, nor crying," and where "GOD shall wipe away all tears from your eyes?"

But JESUS CHRIST brought also to light the doctrine of eternal Death:—the chief evil, as well as the chief good. They who live within reach of His Gospel are inexcusable if they do not know how grievously they and all mankind are fallen from that righteousness in which GOD created them; if they do not think much of the danger they are in, lest they lose their souls for ever

and ever. "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the people that forget God." Surely, however painful it may be, it must be good for a man to know this. Having been once informed of it by our SAVIOUR, we cannot be as if we had never heard of it.

If, indeed, no more had been revealed to man, than that there is a portion in heaven provided for him by GOD ALMIGHTY, but that he, through sin, is in great danger of missing that happiness, and falling into a place where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched:"—if GOD had only made known to us our condition, without distinctly telling us how it may be bettered, something might have been said for spiritual doubtfulness and despondency, though nothing at all for wilful sin and disobedience. But, in His infinite and unspeakable mercy, HE has told us much more than this: HE has not only set life and death clearly before us, but has said distinctly, "Choose life," and has taught us how to do so effectually. This is, emphatically, the Gospel of CHRIST: namely, the way, revealed by HIM from heaven, by which lost and undone sinners may return, if they will, to their Heavenly FATHER; may put off their sin, and save their souls alive. All which our LORD has fully revealed to us, by instructing us in GOD ALMIGHTY'S method of dealing with us by His SON and SPIRIT.

First, whereas all mankind were guilty, before GOD, of deadly sin—all had sinned, and come short of His glory; He has revealed to us, in His SON CHRIST JESUS, the only name by which it is possible for a sinner to obtain forgiveness of the past. The SON of Man has been lifted up in our sight, that whosoever believeth in HIM should not perish, but have everlasting life. The SON, which is the WORD, of GOD, begotten from everlasting of the FATHER, very and eternal God, of one substance with the FATHER; HE has taken our nature upon HIM, has suffered what we deserved, and has purchased for us what we never can deserve—pardon and favour from a just and holy God.

Will any man say, "These are great and high matters: they may be true, but I do not understand them, and why should I trouble myself about them?" If there be any such person, I can only answer him by another question. Suppose you were a drowning man, and your best friend came in sight, endangering his own life to help you, and showing how you might make sure of deli-

verance, if you would only look, and try to move, towards him with a steady confidence in what he told you. Would that be "no concern of yours?" Would you refuse all attention to him, because you could not exactly make out all that he was saying and doing on your behalf?

Yet, if we are Christians at all, we must believe that this is but a faint representation of the mercy made known to us on the Cross, and our great need of it. We must believe, that JESUS CHRIST is now and evermore our SAVIOUR; that HE has bought us with His own blood, to be His, both soul and body, for ever; and, if we have any sense at all of gratitude for unutterable love, or any fear at all of the unutterable misery, which that love, slighted, is sure to bring after it, we must think ourselves more concerned in this, than we can possibly be in any thing else: we must see, that it is no high matter, fit for scholars only to consider, but plain common sense and common gratitude, which tells us, that CHRIST having "died for all," we must not henceforth "live unto ourselves, but unto HIM who died for us, and rose again."

And how are we to live to, or for HIM? In the same sort of way, as when a dutiful child is said to live to, or for his parent, or an affectionate wife to, or for her husband, by looking to HIM habitually and continually, and making it the business of our life to please HIM.

But how is this possible to be done, considering the frail bodies we have, the corrupt world we live in, and the bad habits, most contrary to His will, which too many of us are got into? These are sad and true considerations; and yet it is possible for us to please GOD; for hear the other part of the witness of His SON, the good tidings which HE brought from Heaven. "I will pray the FATHER, and HE shall give you another COMFORTER, that HE may abide with you for ever: even the SPIRIT of Truth."

The HOLY GHOST, who is very and eternal GOD, of one substance with the FATHER, proceeding from the FATHER and the SON, HE is ever present with Christians, strengthening them, in the absence of their REDEEMER, to walk, by faith in HIM, so as to please GOD. HE is ready with His helping hand, to lift our thoughts above earthly things, and fix them on the SON of GOD, who ought to be all in all to us. HE is ready to bless our

Prayers and Communion, our good and humble thoughts and purposes, by making us gradually purer and purer, more and more fit to be received into heaven.

If any one can be found who is careless about these blessings, (and it must be with shame acknowledged, that a great many seem as if they never had heard whether there be any HOLY GHOST,) they must be careless of all divine things; they do not mind whether they are saved or lost: but those who think on this doctrine at all, must allow, that it supplies all a Christian need know, all the help he need ask. Whether he be rich or poor, learned or ignorant, the assistance of this HOLY SPIRIT may be obtained by him, on sincerely praying for it. And when men once know this, one is as capable as another of perceiving what of course must be his own duty. The simplest may understand as clearly as the wisest, that the nearer GOD'S SPIRIT comes to him, to help him in well-doing, the more shameful and intolerable is his conduct, if he go on still in his sins.

Such is the witness of JESUS CHRIST, of which he was speaking to Nicodemus, when HE said, men would not receive it, though made known to them on the most certain of all evidence. "We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen, and ye receive not Our witness."

You have heard the substance of what was spoken, that is, of the Gospel of our LORD and SAVIOUR; and have seen how very nearly the whole of it concerns every one of us. Observe now Who those are that speak, and judge whether it can be safe to disregard them.

The Gospel, by which GOD speaks to us Christians, was not, like former messages, entrusted to Prophets and Angels only: no, not to the highest Archangel in Heaven. But "GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His SON;" His only Begotten, one with HIMSELF in nature and in glory. HE did not only come among us, in His good time, but actually became one of us; was made man; condescended to all our innocent infirmities; to thirst and hunger; to weariness and painfulness; to shame and sorrow; to wounds and death; and all this, though HE was continually in the habit of working the most astonishing miracles, enlightening the blind, cleansing



the lepers, and raising the dead to life. It is no great thing surely that we ask, when we entreat you, for your soul's sake, not to turn a deaf ear to a message thus recommended to you : when we beg you to believe that, to prove which, CHRIST rose from the dead, and to have some care of those souls, to save which, HE came down from Heaven.

Again, when the SON of GOD, having ended all His humiliation, was to return to the right hand of His FATHER ; when HE was to take to HIM His great power, and rule over the world and the Church, HE did not trust us to His Apostles only, nor to any of the Angels in Heaven, but HE sent to us the HOLY GHOST the COMFORTER, to be, in His stead, GOD's witness of eternal things. That gracious and condescending SPIRIT has ever since, night and day, in all corners of the Christian world, been endeavouring to turn the hearts of men, and prevail on them to regard the things which belong unto their peace ; first, by the mighty works and wonderful prophecies of the Apostles and early Christians ; and, in all following times, by the godly motions which he puts into men's minds, when they rightly use the Scriptures and the Sacraments, by the good examples which HE raises up, and the holy lessons which HE teaches, in the Church.

Do not imagine it can be a light thing, an excusable oversight, to slight the witness of the SPIRIT. HE bears long with us ; but HE will not always strive with man. The greater and more continual His condescension now, somuch the more frightful and hopeless, be sure, will their sentence prove at last, who shall be found to have received such unspeakable grace in vain.

Yet our SAVIOUR gives us to understand, that such, too commonly, would be the case : " We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen, and ye receive not Our witness." So it was in our SAVIOUR's days, and so too often it is now. The Holy, Blessed, and Glorious TRINITY, Three Persons and One God, comes down as it were from heaven, with all His glorious attributes, to bear witness of the way of salvation, and men refuse to receive His witness ; to be redeemed, renewed, saved by HIM.

This is often, perhaps most often, done as a mere matter of course. Men take as it were their full swing of the world, indulge themselves without scruple in every passion of their cor-

rupt hearts, and never so much as ask themselves why. When you do get them to think a little of religion, especially when they are put in mind, as on this day, of the Catholic Faith, without which they cannot be saved, namely, that they worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity:—I say, when inconsiderate persons are put in mind of these things, they are apt to say, It is all a mystery, a secret too high for us; it may be very well for people of learning and leisure, but we cannot understand it, and therefore we have nothing to do with it.

And it is very true, that you cannot understand how those Divine Persons, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, should be Three, yet One GOD. You cannot conceive how it should be so: but then the most learned and leisurely person in the world cannot conceive it any better. “Canst thou by searching find out GOD? canst thou find out the ALMIGHTY to perfection?” This question of Job may be asked of one man as well as of another, and must receive from all the same answer: “It is high as heaven: what can we do? it is deeper than hell: what can we know?”

If, then, your not understanding God’s nature is a reason for your not thinking about it, it is equally a reason to every other man in the world; and all piety, all goodness, towards God, may as well be let alone altogether.

But the plain truth is, our not understanding the doctrine of Three Persons in one God is not the smallest reason whatever, why we should leave it out of our minds, nor the smallest difficulty whatever, in the way of acting on it.

This may be made plain by a familiar instance. Take that which St. Paul has referred to, and of which many, no doubt, have thought more or less: “That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.” We put the seed into the ground, dry, dead, and hard as it seems to be, and a fresh living plant springs out of it. Can we at all understand this? Do we know how it takes place? Yet we do not account our ignorance a reason, why we should leave off tilling the earth. Why, then, should the like ignorance, with regard to the manner in which the Three Divine Persons are One only, ever-glorious God—why should our not understanding this be any objection to our religiously remembering it?

Men know not, as the wise man says, how the bones do grow in the womb of her which is with child; but they do not think themselves the less bound to love and honour the mother that gave them birth.

Take it, therefore, for a certain truth, that the Catholic Faith, which you have heard to-day, of Three Persons in One God, to be worshipped, served, and obeyed in all things—this faith is necessary to the salvation of all alike, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, within whose reach God's Providence has set it.

But observe: it must be believed *faithfully*. You must depend on the SON OF GOD as your REDEEMER—you must welcome the HOLY SPIRIT as your COMFORTER, with the same kind of constant feeling wherewith you depend on, and welcome, those whom you know to be your nearest and dearest friends. This you cannot sincerely do, as long as you wilfully continue in any thing that you know to be sin; for so long the thought of their being present, and watching your very heart, will make you uneasy.

Consider, however, before it be too late, what it must be to reject Their witness, or (what comes, in the end, to much the same) to turn carelessly away from it. After all, you must die; and when you die, what pardon, what consolation can you hope for, if you have refused to let your SAVIOUR plead for you to His FATHER, and hardened your hearts against the HOLY GHOST the COMFORTER?



## S E R M O N   L V .

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A LIFE OF DAILY IMPROVEMENT.

PROV. iv. 18.

“ But the path of the just is as the shining light,  
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

It has been endeavoured on some former occasions to direct the attention of seriously disposed persons to certain practical truths—very plain indeed, and unquestionable—yet, perhaps, what we all need constantly to be reminded of, especially in times of trouble, or at least of doubt, trial, and perplexity.

Thus, that “godliness with contentment is great gain”—the best plan and course of life that a person can follow, this is a doctrine of which one may venture to say that we cannot be sufficiently thankful to the HOLY SPIRIT for revealing it to us. It effectually supplies us, in difficult times, with what we most need, viz. encouragement and guidance. The path of religious contentment is a safe path—that is the encouragement; and no other path is safe—there is the guidance.

Now to proceed with some other thoughts of a kindred nature, suitable also (as I before said) for sincere Christians in seasons of trial and perplexity, from whatever cause arising. “The path of the just” (says the HOLY SPIRIT, speaking to us by the mouth of Solomon, or rather perhaps of David) “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

To understand somewhat the force of this divinely beautiful sentence, we must call to mind, what, however, all attentive readers of the Scriptures must be well aware of, that our condition in this world in the sight of ALMIGHTY GOD is very frequently spoken of as that of travellers on their journey; and our life altogether is represented as a way—a path—a progress. And this form of speech is so natural and easily apprehended by us, that it seems to us scarcely at all figurative—we seem to be literally *passing onward* through time into eternity.

At all events, on a very slight reflection, we can have no doubt what it is which our good GOD desires to impress on our thoughts and hearts when HE tells us, that “The path of the just is as the shining light.” It is a kind of parable, setting before us the thought of travellers setting out on a journey very early indeed in the morning, when there is a faint streak of light in the eastern sky; at first, I say, quite faint, but by degrees it grows brighter and brighter, till at last the sun rises above the horizon, and “the perfect day” begins.

You see then that “the path of the just,” i. e. the life and practice of the faithful servants of the LORD is expressly compared to the case of persons travelling on with a little glimmering (or as it is translated, “shining”) light.” But though small and faint, it is enough to show them their way and to guide them in it. And as they go steadily forward, the light increases also, and becomes brighter and brighter, till it shines out at last into “the perfect day.”

I consider that this divine sentence, at all times and places, but especially now in this country, is calculated to afford sincere Christians comfort, encouragement, caution. And may that HOLY SPIRIT, who “caused the words to be written for our learning,” enable us to see and feel their sacred meaning, and to apply it each to our own eternal good.

As to the *comfort* and consolation which this and other similar passages are calculated to afford to sincere Christians, to persons of “humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient hearts;” we may contemplate the subject in two or three distinct points of view, out of many that offer themselves.

For instance, when a person has gone on in careless, or perhaps wicked ways, for a good while, and at length begins to feel the

danger of his situation, death and judgment fast drawing on upon him, and he altogether unprepared and unfit to meet them; his first natural question is (though in a different sense from that probably intended by the jailor at Philippi), "What must I do to be saved?" how can I recover the ground I have lost, how can I answer for precious time wasted, precious talents misapplied? how can I indulge any reasonable hope that my past sins and follies may be washed out by the blood of the LAMB OF GOD, and that the HOLY SPIRIT will grant me the surest evidence of my forgiveness, viz. that the rest of my life hereafter may be pure and holy? I say when a baptized Christian has led an evil or a careless life, these are the kind of thoughts and feelings which may, and ought to arise within him, when he wakes to some sense of his danger.

And at such a time, at such a critical period (as it may be called) of his spiritual life, it is plainly of very great consequence that his *general* views of Christian truth and doctrine should be correct, lest he should enter on a wrong path, and his conversion should prove to be a change, not from evil to good, but only from one evil course to another—of which instances are but too common in the present state of what is called the Christian world.

But perhaps some one might be inclined to ask, How is it possible, when a person has led a deliberately wicked or thoughtless life, that his general views of Christian truth should be correct?

I answer, that I suppose this to be as possible, as it evidently is possible for a well disposed person to be satisfied with false and incorrect views of religious truth. Good sort of people may think wrong, as well as bad sort of people may think right; though, perhaps, it must be confessed that the generality of persons do not think much at all, but are led by their feelings chiefly; sometimes wrong, sometimes right, as it may happen.

However that may be, the sincere and humble penitent, looking back on the past with shame and sorrow, and feeling his own incompetency, even with the Bible in his hand, to frame for himself a plan and scheme on which he may place thorough dependence in so great a matter as that of his everlasting condition; such a one, I say, is most thankful that GOD has not left him to himself, but by the voice of His Church (a voice heard only by humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient hearts, by most unheard) still calls

him into the good and the right way, good and right I say, though narrow and difficult.

Such an one is comforted by being told, that "the path of the just is as the glimmering light of the morning dawn, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day;" that he has no right at present to expect *much* light or aid, that if he can be satisfied with that imperfect, and what the world (even the so-called religious world) esteems "*poor*," instruction which the Church Apostolic has ever ventured to give to her penitent children; then by degrees he shall be led on through the strict path of discipline to higher knowledge, and shall, perhaps, enjoy that comfort, which, for the present at least, he acknowledges he has no title to.

As for all feelings of confident hope, and assurance of final pardon, and experiences (as they are called) of divine grace, these he is so far from earnestly seeking, that he rather fears they might be too much for him, fears they might lift him too high above the low ground of penitence, humility, and self-distrust, where alone he feels he can be safe.

Again, it is a great comfort to the sincerely penitent Christian, to be told that he is to go on his path as having but little light, because he is thereby convinced that he must not venture to trust to himself and his own guidance. And that, I say, is a great comfort to the Christian if he be sincerely penitent; for knowing by past experience his own frailty and blindness, he knows also the great danger and misery of his being left to himself, and therefore is most earnest in beseeching His Heavenly Father that he at least may be kept free from the miserable plague of what is miscalled "religious liberty," and may be with the Holy Apostle St. Paul and the first Christians, even a slave—"a slave" to JESUS CHRIST and His Church.

Hence it is his comfort to think, that it is not his duty to be looking after exceptions, and seeking out difficulties, as if all were to be bright and clear before him; this he does not expect, but rather follows meekly and quietly, yet resolutely on, where God and His Church seem to lead him, whether he can perceive the reason in every case or no; and though he may be ridiculed very often as dark, ignorant, superstitious, &c., yet he is not much moved thereby, but calls to his recollection the inspired words of the prophet of old, Isaiah xlii., words suitable (as he trusts) to his



own case. "Who is blind as he that is perfect—i. e. sincere in God's service—and blind as the LORD's servant?" Blind, i. e. to worldly judgment, dark and ignorant; but before his omniscient Judge he will (he trusts) be dealt with more mercifully. And he humbly hopes that the divine description may, through God's abundant goodness, be realized in his own case, that "the path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

There is also contained in these words great consolation for the faithful penitent Christian, when he calls to mind that in the present state of things it is but darkness, or at the best but what may be called the morning twilight with us. Some people indeed talk great things, and we often read, in modern popular books, of the vast advances which have been made of late years, not merely in temporal knowledge, but even in spiritual: and books have lately been written to show very confidently that the first Christians, those who were personally acquainted with St. John and other Apostles, and even with our SAVIOUR Himself, that these holy men had not such true evangelical knowledge and saving light, as some modern popular preacher or other.

Far be it from any serious person amongst us to indulge so vain and preposterous an imagination: but I mention the fact as one proof among many of the perplexed state of things in which our lot is cast, and to show what need we have to "take heed (as our SAVIOUR warned His hearers) to take heed," both as a nation and as individuals, "lest the light which is in us be darkness." "For (as HE so solemnly added) if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

But, as I was saying, it is a substantial comfort to the sincere and reflecting Christian to remember, that at the best we are but in a kind of morning twilight: the wisest of men, whatever he may fancy, sees into the mysteries of Divine truth "but as through a glass, darkly" and by reflection, as St. Paul says. To those who here walk by faith, not by sight, is offered the blessed hope and promise beyond the grave of seeing their SAVIOUR face to face, of knowing even as they are known, in that "perfect day," where there shall be no more night after it, or where to God's faithful servants their "sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; but the LORD shall be their everlasting

light," or rather, where "the holy city, new Jerusalem," shall have "no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God shall lighten it, and the LAMB shall be the light thereof."

This is that "perfect day" towards which "the path of the just" though here dim and difficult, yet "shineth more and more:" and to look on *to* this perfect day is ground of solid hope and comfort to the true penitent.

But besides the comfort which this divine sentence is fitted to impart to humble and contrite hearts, there may also be obtained from it much positive *encouragement* in our present difficult and perplexing position.

When I say difficult and perplexing, I mean to really and truly sincere Christians, to persons who wish and try to follow the will of JESUS CHRIST, without regard to popular opinion without, or their own feelings within. To people in general, in respect of religion, I suppose the times are not difficult and perplexing; because every person is quite at liberty to be of any religion, or no religion, just as he pleases. In fact we may say that Christianity is quietly being cast off, except so far as it concerns the temporal interest of the country or of individuals, and a great struggle is at this moment being made to do without religion altogether if possible. Therefore I say to people in general at this day, religion is not such a matter of doubt or perplexity, but to sincerely serious persons. I mean those who really desire not to *feel* in God's favour, or to *appear* so, but to *be* so (and such we know from our LORD's own prophecy, but few will be); to such persons, in their doubts and anxieties, it is a great encouragement to be assured on the highest authority, what *sort* of life they ought to try to lead: that they are not to expect to have all clear before them at once, but that their path, if they are indeed in the number of the just, the faithful penitent servants of the LORD JESUS, and in HIM accounted righteous and just before GOD, that their path must be "as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Thus then having a promise of increasing light, so they feel that they ought to have great encouragement to "press forward" as the Apostle says: "not content with what they have attained to," or "as if they were already perfect."

They look back to their past faults, not for a mere barren and fruitless lamentation over them, not confessing themselves miserable sinners, and so leaving off, but really considering in what ways they can grow better, positively better.

For instance, the person who has been in times past used to swear, and still, though he has long left off so miserable a habit, still uses the sacred name of GOD too familiarly, such an one "sets a watch over his mouth and keeps the door of his lips," or rather, like the Psalmist, prays GOD to do it for him, that henceforth nothing at all may escape him unworthy of that awful Majesty before whom he stands.

The person who has been used to pay *some* attention to the LORD'S Holy Day and to the sacred rules of the ancient Church, takes up more serious thoughts on these subjects, does not merely lament many past Sundays, spent partly or wholly in idleness or folly, in going now to one place of worship, now to another, and now nowhere—just as inclination or fancy might lead: all these things he looks back upon with self-condemnation, as indications of a want of real seriousness:—so he does not merely do this—does not rest in this self-condemnation, but resolves to put his mind in earnest to the subject, and in practice to begin a new system with himself, where he sees himself deficient.

The person who has been used to spend more than he need do, on his own personal comforts, as some persons (well disposed, I mean,) do spend more than is necessary on eating, drinking, dress, &c.; such an one resolves to be more strict with himself in these respects, and whilst he exercises over his own temper a wholesome discipline of self-denial, he is able also to bestow his Master's money more immediately to his Master's honour and service.

There are instances, a few among many, in which well-disposed Christians are encouraged to endeavour daily to lead a new life (as the Catechism says). And thus will their path be that of the just, like "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

But, as I before said, the sincere member of CHRIST'S Church finds in this divine sentence, not only *comfort* and *encouragement* amidst the many difficulties now surrounding his path: there is also in this verse, if closely looked into, implied a very solemn word of *caution*.

“The path of the just” is as a glimmering light of the morning dawn. The path of the just, *i. e.* the course of life of those whose hearts are, as I said, according to the description of the ancient Church, “humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient.” That such alone can be accounted “just before God through the merits and atonement of their SAVIOUR,” every page as one may say of the Scriptures, all the rules and doctrines of the ancient Church must teach us, if we are disposed to be taught.

Therefore if our life be not one of habitual improvement, if we are contented to go on month after month, and year after year, much as we used to be, supposing that we are sufficiently safe and need trouble ourselves but little about the result, then surely it cannot at least be affirmed of us that our path is shining more and more towards the perfection of light and holiness, and then surely we have reason to fear that we shall not in the end attain to the resurrection of the just, shall not be numbered with God’s saints in glory everlasting.

The verse following the text, as it adds force and energy to the text itself, so is it of a very startling tone: especially it should startle us, if we are too much inclined, as I suppose most people now are, to rest satisfied with their spiritual condition, some on one ground, some on another.

“The way of the wicked is as darkness. They know not at what they stumble.” The meaning of which, probably, is, that when men’s hearts are not before God “humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient,” though they may maintain a fair character in the world, and even be esteemed sufficiently religious, yet without lowliness, penitence, and obedience, their way is as if they were in darkness, they know not at what they stumble.

In God’s just judgments they are allowed to object, and find fault, and (in Scripture language) be offended, *i. e.* literally stumble at they know not what. And their description must be in the end the very converse of the faithful penitent.

While the path of the true Christian is as the morning twilight, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day:

The path of the false Christian is as the evening twilight, which increaseth more and more unto the perfect darkness.

Hence, I say, we have such need of caution, all of us. I say we have equally need of it, whether we feel this necessity or no.

Indeed, it may well seem, that the less we feel it, the more we need it.

Only let it be our care, as many of us as desire to be faithful members of CHRIST'S Holy Church, not in name and expression only, but in life and practice; let it be our care to *be* thus cautious.

Let us bear in mind, that whatever may have been the case formerly in this country, to be a *consistent* member of CHRIST'S true Church in the present day requires much courage and resolution. To be an *inconsistent* member is easy enough.

And one great test of our consistency, a test which I should think we might fairly apply to ascertain our spiritual condition before God, is that implied in the truth we have been now considering.

If our path be one of daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, *progress*—if we are growing substantially *better* as we grow older—if we are more penitent and kind, more meek, humble, and obedient, more diligent and self-denying, more anxious about *being* what we ought to be, and less anxious about *feeling* so, or *appearing* so; then we may have hope that our religion is somewhat substantial—that it can stand against scorn and contempt without, and also against impatience, fretfulness, and despondency within—that we are, in some faint degree at least, unworthy as we are—yet in some faint degree “adorning the doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR”—that the path we have entered on is the path of the just, and will be found to be “as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”—even that perfect, glorious, endless day, when to CHRIST'S “humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient” servants, the LORD shall reveal HIMSELF as their “everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended.”

## SERMON LVI.

### DANGER OF MISTAKING DARKNESS FOR LIGHT.

ST. LUKE xi. 35.

“Take heed therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness.”

THERE have been offered to your thoughts, on a former occasion, some few reflections on what may be called, “the progressive nature of a Christian life,”—I mean the doctrine, that the sincere Christian must not at all expect to have every thing light and plain before him now, but, like a traveller in the twilight of morning, must be content to walk onwards with (perhaps) very little light, though still increasing, patiently trusting that, when the sun shall be risen, all will be bright and clear.

Thus (as we saw) is “the path of the just, like the shining light,” the first glimmering streak of the morning in the eastern sky, “that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” But as the subject is one of great and touching importance, especially in trying times (as I said), it may be well for us to turn our thoughts again to it; especially with a view to guard ourselves, by the aid of GOD'S merciful SPIRIT, against certain errors relating to it,—errors into which we may possibly be all, more or less, in danger of falling. Indeed, no doubt, we are in danger; and this the more, if we are not aware of our danger, or do not choose to allow it, or to reflect on it.

It may well seem, that in His love for mankind, and His deep sense of this our danger, the ever-blessed JESUS framed that His

most expressive parable, concerning spiritual light and darkness; and, as it appears, not once or twice only, but frequently, addressed it to His disciples. From St. Luke, compared with St. Matthew, we find that one occasion on which our LORD uttered it, was the following;—

“The people being gathered thick together,” with curiosity, not only to see His miracles, but also to hear His doctrine, HE took the opportunity from a scornful demand which the Scribes and Pharisees put to HIM:—“Master,” said they, after all His miracles, “we wish to see a sign from THEE.” From this HE took occasion to offer, to considerate persons among the multitude, some solemn warnings concerning both the value of the Gospel, and the danger of neglecting it.

“The Ninevites (said HE) repented at the preaching of Jonas, but a greater than Jonas is here.”

“The Queen of the South came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but a greater than Solomon is here.” And then, as if HE continued,—

These great men of the Jews know not what privileges they possess; they, with all their light, are, as it were, in a state of spiritual darkness;—they are so themselves, and would keep others in the same;—their conduct is as foolish and unkind, as would be that of persons who should light a candle, and then put it under a bushel, instead of setting it on the stand, where it might give light to all who are in the room.

“The light of man’s body is the eye,” as the light of the soul is religion. And as in the bodily eyes, if the sight be single, clear, and distinct, the whole body is, as it were, enlightened—guided to execute its proper duties: whereas if the sight be injured, evil, dim, and confused, the whole body suffers for it—is perplexed, and in a manner “full of darkness:” so is it with man’s spiritual condition.

If a person’s religion be “single,” pure, and springing from unfeigned love of GOD, then the whole conduct is consistent—all is “full of light.”

But if a person’s religion be “evil,” founded on some false principle originally, or corrupted by intercourse with the world, or debased by carnal lusts, then all is confusion and inconsistency, and in a manner “full of darkness.”

The danger of which inconsistency, our Blessed LORD gave His first disciples, and all Christians since, most solemn warning of, when HE added those startling words—"Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness." As much as to say, Take heed how you imagine too hastily, that you are safe in the way of truth and salvation; for possibly you may be altogether mistaken.

The necessity of such a caution as this, may appear from a few considerations out of many which must suggest themselves to a thoughtful mind.

As, *e. g.* some people are greatly set up by mere knowledge. Being a little more clever or knowing in some matters than their neighbours, they think at once they know every thing. Nothing is above them. So by degrees they look on themselves as specially wise and enlightened, and every one else they pronounce to be in the dark. This is often the case with persons who affect to hold what are called very enlarged and liberal notions about religion—notions tending first to Socinianism, and so on to Deism and Infidelity.

To them, as surely as the Gospel is true, must be addressed the divine warning, if they would be prevailed on to listen to it—"Take heed! for the light which is in thee is but darkness!"

Again, we must be aware that it is by no means uncommon for people to imagine, or to act as if they imagined, that "gain is godliness" (as the Apostle says); that a man has quite enough of religion in him, if he can get through life in a respectable sort of way; keeping up a fair character in society; complying with the laws and customs of his neighbourhood; and particularly careful not to be "righteous over much," *i. e.* as he understands it, not to have more religion than is quite necessary. It is no wonder, that, with such a disposition as this, a person should think very little of all the peculiar doctrines and obligations of the Church and Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. In name and profession he is indeed a Christian, because he happens to be born in a Christian land. But he suffers no creed to interfere with his comforts or pursuits; he thinks seldom or never of the great mysteries of redemption and sanctification; what has been done for him, and what still remains to be done; these things trouble him not, nor does he ever intend that they shall. He has, he thinks, light



sufficient to enable him to lead what he calls a decent moral life ; and what more, he asks, can be necessary ?

Of such an one, again, it must be said, that, if the Gospel be indeed true, "the light which is in him is but darkness." He flatters himself that the path he has chosen is a safe one ; but he will find in the end, that, when his accounts for eternity are to be made up, he has to deal with one who is no longer to him a SAVIOUR, but a strict, omniscient, and justly-offended Judge.

Another case may be mentioned, as one, alas ! by no means uncommon, viz. when persons make the state of their feelings the test and proof of their religious sincerity. When they feel happy, comfortable, and confident, this, they think, is to be in light. When, on the contrary, they see persons inclined to be in alarm for themselves, in doubt and perplexity, this is what they consider being in darkness.

Now, I say not that it is *wicked* to indulge such fancies as these (for they are but fancies), but that they are erroneous, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, and therefore greatly to be guarded against,—this, I think, no candid inquirer into the nature and history of the Christian revelation can deny or question.

The error is one of that kind described by the ancient prophet as doubly mischievous. It "makes the heart of the righteous sad, whom GOD would not have made sad ; and it strengtheneth and encourageth the wicked, that he should not return from his evil way, by promising him life."

Surely, then, to a person so suffering himself to be misled, the divine warning of the HOLY JESUS must be well supposed to be addressed—"Take heed lest the light which is in thee be indeed (not light, but) darkness."

We may, too, consider the case of persons whose knowledge of Christian truth is substantial ; who, if called upon, are able to give a reason of their faith and profession ; yet, if their lives and conduct be not suitable to this their knowledge, if (as the Apostle says) they "hold the truth in unrighteousness," then, though they have certainly "light in them," yet, to themselves, owing to their wilful neglect and abuse of the light, to them, personally and practically, it is but "darkness," and so will be found in the end.

In the present state of the Christian world, owing to the general prevalence of error, in Protestant countries (as they are called) no less than in those where Popery is cherished; in Christian countries generally, I say, owing to the prevalence of mistaken and false notions of various kinds, the substantial knowledge of the Gospel is not probably so common as many persons, whether Romanists or Protestants, might imagine.

Be they few or many, however, who possess this sacred knowledge, on whom this real light shines, still they must "not be high-minded, but fear." Light may shine on them, yet to them it may be but darkness—as is implied in the words of the Blessed JESUS Himself—we may "have light, yet not believe in the light, nor walk as children of light," and then, surely the light which is in us must be darkness, and how great must that darkness be!

For as when salt has lost its savour, there is nothing else which can recover it, so when the Gospel fails to enlighten, either a nation or individuals, no other light can be effectual, there can remain only (as the Prophet says) "the shadow of death, even gross darkness."

According to our LORD's awful words just referred to, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Thus, then, it may seem that, though we have earthly wisdom, skill, or cleverness in any respect, or in many respects; though we may be leading what is called a decent, respectable life, with a character for honesty, friendliness, and other social virtues; though we may be able to gratify our imaginations with assurances of inward (and as we think) spiritual light, feelings of joy, peace, and a sense of the Divine love towards us, freeing us from all doubts and fears; and chiefly though we may have a substantial knowledge of Christian doctrine, so as to be able to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason for our faith and profession: yet, still, it seems to be true—and if true, it is an awful truth—that the light which is in us may be found after all, to us at least, to be but darkness. Thus, a person possessed of great worldly wisdom, knowledge of business, skill in any art or science, may yet, we all know, be totally ignorant and regardless of heavenly knowledge, the wisdom that is from above.

He, therefore, but deceives himself when he fancies that he is

in the enjoyment of superior light ; the persons whom he looks down upon and despises as simple and ignorant, are, to the eye of truth, wiser than he with all his wisdom ; they are in light, he in darkness.

In like manner, though persons may lead what is called a decent, respectable kind of life, maintaining a good character in the world, and taking care to do nothing for which the laws of the land or the customs of society will call them to account ; yet if all the while they are (as is, alas ! not uncommonly the case) regardless of their peculiar duties and privileges as Christians ; what will their good character avail them in the great accounting day ?

What, it may be asked, do such persons give up for the Gospel's sake ? Where is their humility, their self-denial, their Christian love ? Where appears in all their conduct any evidence of that holiness, without which no man shall see the LORD ; without which no man shall see HIM either here or hereafter ; here by faith, or hereafter in glory ?

And then, must not such an one be in a state of darkness, however he may flatter himself he has sufficient light ? Nay, is it not plain and certain, certain as is the truth of the Gospel, that the light which is in him is indeed darkness.

And with regard to another kind of character before referred to, viz., those who are disposed to build too much on the sandy foundation of feeling : they need to be reminded, though it be indeed difficult to obtain their attention, but they do need to be reminded, that the light which is in them, or at least which they think is in them, is after all but darkness.

These feelings, as all must allow, whether they make a person happy or unhappy, may *possibly* be mere emotions. And if they may possibly be so, then it is plain they cannot be depended on, they have nothing substantial in them ; they may last, more or less, for days, weeks, months, or even years ; but in the end, when weighed in the balances, they will be found wanting, without weight or substance.

Therefore, I repeat, they are not to be depended on as guides in so great a matter as eternal salvation, for they may mislead a person, and doubtless often do ; doubtless under the delusion caused by them, the double mischief I before alluded to is often

produced ; those who are in darkness flatter themselves they are in the light ; whilst those who in God's sight enjoy the light, the light of His favour and protection, yet feel themselves in darkness and almost in despair.

But chiefly it concerns us all to remember, that it is at least *possible* for a person to possess a substantial knowledge of Christian truth, and yet to be all the while practically in the dark, or, according to our SAVIOUR's emphatic expression, "walking in darkness." Such an one's knowledge of the Gospel may be so far substantial, as that he may possess correct views of the doctrine of the Gospel as founded in the Scriptures, and held by the Catholic Church of CHRIST from the Primitive times to this day—I say, a person may be able to take a correct and masterly view of the whole plan of the Gospel, he may be familiarly acquainted with the Scriptures, he may be able to speak with eloquence, and to argue with learning and ingenuity, and with correctness too, and yet all the while be himself, and in his own practice, negligent of the holy rules of the Gospel ; his heart may not be humble, lowly, penitent, or obedient ; he may be unkind in his temper, uncharitable in his censures ; may transgress the sacred rules of temperance, soberness, and chastity ; then what will his knowledge avail him ? Surely it will only be his heavier condemnation. The light that is in him may benefit others, to himself it is worse than useless ; in his vain confidence he may never so much as entertain a doubt about his own spiritual state, and yet to him all the while may be too truly applied St. John's startling description of the uncharitable Christian—

" He is in darkness,  
And walketh in darkness,  
And knoweth not whither he goeth,  
Because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

You will see then, if you turn your thoughts to this very touching subject, that we are in many ways in danger of deceiving ourselves in regard to our spiritual condition, and therefore, that the warning of the Blessed JESUS does indeed call for our most serious and obedient regard. I mean, when HE said to His Disciples, not of the early Church only but of every age since, and therefore to us :

"Take heed, that the light which is in thee be not darkness."

To this purpose, let me offer a few hints, which, though plain, and obvious enough, may yet, by the Divine Blessing, be useful to us, at least occasionally.

In the first place, we should be careful that our earthly wisdom of whatever kind, scholarship, skill in business, cleverness and ability in the management of any matters whatever, that all should be sanctified by the presence also of that wisdom which is from above.

“ Even nature itself,” as the Apostle says, “ teacheth us” to dislike vanity and self-conceit ; it is one of the greatest trials of patience to be in company with persons of such dispositions. Let us turn this our dislike against ourselves, against these dispositions lurking in our breasts,—and whatever we do well, or think we do well—let us indulge no feeling of conceit or self-satisfaction about it ; ever remembering that in God’s sight such feelings are evidences of a state of darkness and ignorance, and that in such cases is especially exemplified the truth of the Divine sentence : “ The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” Such kind of “ light” is but “ darkness.” “ He that so exalteth himself shall be abased.”

In the next place, persons who are inclined to place much dependence on the respectability of their characters, and the morality of their general conduct, while at the same time they are neglectful of the peculiar doctrines and precepts of the Gospel ; such persons must be warned that their case is one of extreme danger. To lead a (so called) moral, decent, respectable life is of course a good thing so far as it goes. But if the Gospel be true, there can be no real morality, integrity, or respectability, except on the principles of the Gospel.

And though the world may determine otherwise, this does not alter the case: according to the solemn warning of the Blessed JESUS Himself, “ Whosoever (said HE) shall be ashamed of ME and of My words, in an evil and adulterous generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when HE shall come in glory.”

If again we are inclined to trust to our good feelings as the *foundation* of our confidence (for that is the truth in many instances, though people would not willingly allow it to be so in their own case) : but I say, if we are disposed to cherish a religion of

feeling, then we must try ourselves, very strictly, in matters of plain duty.

Are we willing to obey them that have the rule over us (as the Apostle says), to yield a cheerful obedience to the ancient rules of the Church ? if not, we must not talk about religious feeling : it is evidently a mere delusion. Do we strive in all common matters of intercourse in business or society to be kind, honest, obliging, patient, humble, forgiving, for CHRIST'S sake ? if not, any religious feelings we may indulge, are in like manner but a delusion. And if also we do not maintain a continual struggle with ourselves, and our tempers and dispositions, especially where we are most in danger of being overcome, then too, what we call our religious feelings are but a mere delusion, as will appear some day. This is a very humiliating thought, and what ought to be more dwelt on than it is by persons who, deceived by popular opinion and their own feelings, allow themselves in many practices of plain disobedience. And yet all the while they are not aware of it, because they will not consider, will not bow down their proud necks to the yoke of the despised and crucified JESUS.

Lastly, let persons who have had the advantages of substantial religious instruction, and who set some value on this their privilege—let such persons, above all others, be careful lest the light which is indeed in them, should in the end, to them, prove to be but darkness. To such persons it might be said, Remember that “to whom much is given of him will be much required.” If you, indeed, are blest with this highest of all knowledge, then beware lest you make a wrong use of it, or no use at all.

Therefore, rest not satisfied with the progress you have already made, however considerable you may think it, or it may really be ; but still press forward for the prize of your high calling in CHRIST JESUS.

Above all things avoid every shadow of pride or self-confidence ; remember that what you know is nothing in comparison of what you are ignorant of ; therefore go low by the ground, and let your chief anxiety be not to obtain a *mere* increase of knowledge, but rather in proportion as your knowledge increases, to grow also more holy, meek, and heavenly-minded, more humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient ; more fit in short for the society of those blessed spirits whose employment and whose happiness it is

in the presence of the LORD, both theirs and ours, to fulfil His commandment, and to hearken unto the voice of His words.

Thus, as time goes on, if we endeavour more and more to adorn the doctrine of GOD our SAVIOUR, we may reasonably hope that the light which is in us will not prove to be darkness.

But if we do not endeavour thus by the aid of the HOLY SPIRIT to regulate our lives and hearts, neither a good character, nor good feelings, nor good knowledge will prove us to be sincere members of CHRIST'S Holy Church. And unquestionably, this, *if true*, is well deserving the consideration of all persons who are in earnest in their religion, especially in these times of spiritual danger and perplexity.

## SERMON LVII.

DANGER OF MISTAKING THE SHADOW FOR THE SUBSTANCE.

2 COR. v. 9.

“ Wherefore we labour, [endeavour, Marg.]  
That, whether present or absent,  
We may be accepted of Him.”

WHATEVER the causes may be, all persons of observation must, I should think, confess it to be the fact, that, in these times, there is great and peculiar danger of people's mistaking what the good Bishop Wilson most expressively calls “ shadows of religion ” for the substance of it.

Of course, in every age of the Church, this danger has existed, and will doubtless to the end of time. By it, indeed, very particularly, God tries men's hearts, whether they are faithful and sincere, or false and hypocritical. But this trial is, perhaps, in these the latter days of the Church, more than usually severe, as may appear from one or two considerations among others which might be mentioned.

—Thus, it is the great misfortune of many persons, probably I may say the majority, that they have not been brought up and educated in the substantial knowledge of divine truth. Indeed it is certain, that many persons now openly avow, and more still act upon, the wild and infidel notion, that children should be taught every thing but religion; that their minds should be left free, as it is called, and unprejudiced to choose for themselves as they



grow up, whether they will be of any religion or of none. As if human life were neither short nor uncertain; as if divine knowledge were acquired all at once, without time, care, and diligence; as if man's heart were naturally disposed to seek this knowledge, or to act up to it after it was acquired. The very contrary of all which we know too well to be the case.

But even where something of religious knowledge is imparted, in how many instances must it be considered as scarcely more than a shadow of the truth; at least, if what the Apostles and primitive Christians believed, did, and suffered, is to be regarded as evidence of what the substance of religion is.

To go to church, or to a meeting-house, or both, once or twice a week, is, I suppose, by a considerable majority of persons reckoned "sufficient," as they would call it, for the fulfilment of religious duties.

Men forget that the Church of CHRIST is a vast body, or sacred society, having its peculiar rules and ordinances; requiring pains and attention, and a due measure of instruction in its members, together with a spirit of obedience and uniform regard to what may be called evangelical discipline.

And this, of course, implies constant care and seriousness, and positive substantial exertions—exertions taking time, trouble, and expense—and, of the two, rather unpleasant than pleasant to us.

At least, such seems to be the plain doctrine of our Blessed LORD and His Apostles, illustrated by the practice of the primitive Christians.

—It is also worthy of consideration, as showing the danger in which we Christians of these latter days are, of mistaking the shadow of religion for the substance of it; that we are all so much disposed to take for granted, as if there could be no question about it, that wisdom, knowledge, and liberty, must, of necessity, be good things.

The Christian view rather is, or should be, that these are only good, when restrained, guided, and sanctified by true religion, *i. e.*, by the Gospel of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. This is very plain, on a very slight reflection; but we are too apt to forget it, as I said. And so the substance of religion is too often sacrificed

before the vain idols—popular opinion or private fancy,—and in its place is substituted a deceitful shadow.

Now the doctrine of our Blessed SAVIOUR, and the practice of the Apostles and first Christians, as any one may easily be convinced of on the slightest examination, is quite opposed to any views or imaginations of the kind I am now referring to.

For instance, on the present occasion, to consider only the testimony of the illustrious Apostle St. Paul—testimony borne no less by what he did than by what he taught—we see that he zealously and uniformly followed himself, and entreated others to follow, the substance of religion;—the substance, *i. e.*, as distinct from any shadows or fancies of it.

To attempt to prove this by instances, would be in a manner to recount all the history of this great Apostle, and to go over the arguments of all his Epistles. It will be fully sufficient for the humble inquirer that we limit our attention to that passage in the Second Epistle to the Christians at Corinth. It will there easily appear what sort of Christian St. Paul was, and what we all ought to pray and “endeavour” (as the text says) to be.

And here let me just say, what probably I have on former occasions suggested, that if we would be careful and attentive readers of the Holy Scriptures, it is of importance that we pay regard to the marginal translations. For there are, of course, a great many words and expressions about which the translators doubted what was the most correct rendering. Consequently, the translation in the margin is often *quite* as much to be depended on and regarded, as what we commonly read.

To mention only two or three instances out of this Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.

In chap. ii. ult. “We are not (says he) as many, which *corrupt* the word of GOD,” or, margin, “which *deal deceitfully* with the word of GOD.”

In chap. iii. ult. “We all (*i. e.* as faithful Christians), beholding as in a glass and by reflection the glory of the LORD, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as *by the Spirit of the LORD*,” or, margin, “even as *of the LORD the SPIRIT*.”

In the 4th chap. 8th ver. “We are perplexed (says he, re-

counting his trials in his Master's cause, we are perplexed) but *not in despair*," or, margin, "*not altogether without help or means*."

In the 5th chap., describing the great privileges and duties of a Christian, he says, ver. 17, "Therefore if any man be in CHRIST, *he is a new creature*," or, margin, "*let him be a new creature*."

And in the same chapter, ver. 8, having expressed, with divine energy, his hope of immortal glory, and wishing that he might be allowed (as he says elsewhere) "to depart and be with CHRIST," "to be absent from the body, and to be with the LORD," the great Apostle checks his feelings, as it were, and seems to say—But, after all, the great question with me is, not whether I am present with CHRIST, or absent from HIM, but whether I am well-pleasing to HIM—living so as to be accepted of HIM; for this I "labour," or, margin, "endeavour." The original word occurs only twice besides in the text, viz., Rom. xv. 20, where it is translated to "strive," "I have *strived* to preach the Gospel;" and 1 Thess. iv. 11, where it is translated to "study," as, "*study* to be quiet." Literally, the word expresses in the text, it is the object of all my anxiety—all my ambition, "whether present or absent, to be accepted of HIM," to do what is well-pleasing in His sight.

—Now we must remember always, that St. Paul's life was one of real hardship and affliction; yet he never repined or murmured at it, never wished that it should be otherwise. Rather he seems to have been apprehensive, lest the greatness of his privileges should have made him proud and self-confident; and, therefore, he was even thankful to be kept low, degraded, and despised, in his own opinion and that of the world around him.

"We preach not ourselves (says he), but CHRIST JESUS the LORD, and ourselves your servants for JESUS' sake.

"For GOD, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, thereby producing the light of the glorious knowledge of GOD in JESUS CHRIST.

"But (he goes on to say) we have this treasure, this inestimable heavenly privilege, this commission apostolical, in earthen vessels, in a frail corruptible body, in a mind subject to the common infirmities of mankind, to depression of spirits, to errors in judgment, that there may be no room for boasting, that the excellency of the power may be of GOD, and not of us."

And then he sums up the account of his condition, balancing, as it were, the goods and the evils of it against each other. "Troubled on every side, yet not distressed;—Perplexed, but not altogether without help or means;—Persecuted, but not forsaken;—Cast down, but not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of the LORD JESUS, that the life also of JESUS might be made manifest, or appear exemplified in our body, in our mortal flesh, in our course of life.

"And though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, yea, an eternal weight of glory."

He then proceeds (in this 5th chap.) to express his anxiety to be approved and accepted of his LORD and Master, as if that were the feeling which absorbed, as it were, and swallowed up all others in his heart.

"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of GOD, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

"We know that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the LORD; and we desire rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the LORD." But, however, the object of all our ambition, what we "endeavour" and "labour" after, is, "that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of HIM," and well-pleasing in His sight; "for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of CHRIST."

That St. Paul's religion, then, was no shadow, but somewhat solid and substantial, is evident.

It greatly concerns us to ascertain, each person for himself, whether we have herein followed the holy example of the Apostle; what, in the time past of our lives, has been our chief trouble and anxiety; whether (if we have indeed been in earnest in our Christian profession) we were chiefly concerned about the state of our feelings, or the course of our practice; whether, in short, our chief "labour," ambition, and anxiety, have been, "that whether" comfortable or uncomfortable, "present or absent, we may be accepted of, and well pleasing unto HIM."

This is an inquiry which it greatly concerns all sincere Christians to make with seriousness and impartiality, and may the

Blessed SPIRIT of GOD enable us so to do, to our everlasting good.

Now it is to be considered and deplored, that vast numbers of persons do go on through life to old age and their death-beds, without caring at all, much less labouring, to be accepted by the LORD JESUS CHRIST. Not that they are altogether without religion: they would be very sorry to think they could be so; but then their religion is too much of a selfish kind; not what will please their GOD and SAVIOUR, but what will make themselves comfortable and safe.

It ought, then, to be a great question with each of us:—Have I really, in the time past of my life, been anxious and in earnest about my spiritual condition? And if we can answer, Yes, to this question, we have so far reason to be thankful. But more than this; we must go on to ask—What has my religious seriousness consisted in? Has it been an anxiety chiefly, or only, to *feel* comfortable and safe; or has it been an anxiety to do and suffer according to GOD's will, and against my own? And if, again, we can have the comfort of answering, Yes, to this inquiry also, still another question remains:—Have we actually endeavoured to put this our conviction into practice; have we, by divine aid, laboured as the Apostle says,—that whether present or absent, whether feeling the comforts of GOD's presence or not, we may be accepted by HIM—be well-pleasing in His sight? And if we can indeed, with all humility, answer this question favourably, then we have indeed reason to be thankful to our HEAVENLY FATHER, SAVIOUR, and Guide, who has done so much for our souls, and to beseech HIM that HE would never leave us nor forsake us; but that we may continue in that state of salvation into which HE has brought us, unto our life's end.

But still, as the matter is one of great importance, and one wherein we may too easily deceive ourselves, let us consider a little what is implied in so solemn an assertion as that of the holy Apostle in the text. “It is the object of all my ambition, anxiety, and labour, that, whether present or absent, in prosperity or adversity, in joy or sorrow, in hope or fear, I may be acceptable to my LORD and Master CHRIST JESUS.”

This, then, I suppose, is the point which we all ought to aim

at, and short of which we ought not to rest satisfied, to be always so behaving ourselves as to be acceptable and well-pleasing to the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

We are perhaps too apt to shelter ourselves under the general terms of religion and seriousness, (neither of which words are to be found in the Bible, at least not in the sense in which they are commonly understood;) it were better to proceed at once by the Apostolic rule, The doing what is well-pleasing to our LORD and Master.

But possibly a person may say, that if we are serious and religious, we are sure to be acceptable to CHRIST JESUS. Rather, I should think it safer to say, if we lead a life well-pleasing to HIM, we are sure to be serious and religious.

And to show that this is not a distinction without a difference, we need only call to mind the characters of the Scribes and Pharisees as set forth in the New Testament. They were surely serious and religious persons, as much so as Jews could be, in common opinion at least, but far indeed from being accepted of God, though themselves had clearly no doubts of their acceptableness.

And so in these times it is a dangerous thing for a person to conclude that he is what he ought to be, because he is considered by others and esteems himself to be serious and religious.

That is not the question—the question is, whether he really labours to be acceptable and well-pleasing to JESUS CHRIST. At least this is the rule of the Holy Apostle, and who shall dare to gainsay it?

—You see then that the ruling principle of the Christian's life, in which I include the daily course of his thoughts, words, and actions, is, to please the LORD JESUS CHRIST, to be accepted of HIM.

And this principle the true Christian will “labour” to be guided by under all discouragements, “whether present or absent,” as the text says, whether the world, the Christian world, frowns or smiles on him; nay, more than this, whether he feels (what are called) the consolations of the SPIRIT or not. For this probably may be the meaning of the expression “whether present or absent;” as much as to say, this is not to be brought

into the calculation; the only question is, am I, or am I not, doing what is acceptable and well-pleasing to the LORD JESUS CHRIST?

If this were attended to, it would make a greater difference in the views and practices even of religiously disposed persons, and much more of others, than can easily be believed. This may be illustrated by one or two familiar examples.

We may suppose the case of persons decent and respectable in society,—honest, punctual, and civil in their neighbourhood—only given occasionally to swear when they are provoked, and *unfortunately* seldom or never going to any place of worship, as the modern phrase is.

Such persons go through life what is called very creditably; their swearing a little now and then, or their not going to Church, are small matters in the world's view: religion does not consist in forms, it is said, and why may not God be worshipped at home or in the field as well as within four walls?

So the wicked world passes people off: but when the soul of the negligent Christian appears before its God, will he be able to say for himself that his life was what a Christian's ought to be—that in his swearing, and in his neglect of outward religion, (as it is often contemptuously and erroneously termed) he was labouring to be accepted by his SAVIOUR?

To say so would be an impious mockery; and yet if he were not so labouring, can he expect to be accepted in the great accounting day? Will his punctuality, or his civility, or his seldom swearing, or his general respectability, save him in that day? That day, I say, when, (as the HOLY SPIRIT Himself has put the question before us) “if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

Again, to persons who have some degree of what is called seriousness in religion, but at the same time are no *bigots*, who think one profession as good as another—in other words, who abhor the thought of abiding in meekness and humility by the ancient and severe rules of the Holy Catholic Church; to such persons the words of St. Paul are most valuable, as a means of leading them to ascertain their true spiritual condition.

To them the question may be put—arc you indeed labouring,

whether present or absent, to be accepted of the LORD JESUS CHRIST? Is it to please your SAVIOUR that you go about from one place of worship to another, to judge of doctrines, to criticise preachers, to set at nought unity, to encourage divisions? Do you do this to please your SAVIOUR, or rather is it not to please yourself?

And then, what is the value of what you call your religion—your high-wrought feelings—your ill-grounded confidences? Do they not rather endanger the soul than edify it? Can any thing in short really edify it, except love for our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR, and a constant uniform endeavour or (as the text says) “labour” to please HIM? And can it please HIM to see Christians careless and indifferent about the sacred rules of order and unity, and communion with that Church which HE has purchased with His own blood?

The time I am persuaded is not very far distant, when a good many thoughtful persons, both Church-people and Dissenters, will see and lament their erroneous and deficient notions on this great subject of Church unity. In the meantime it *must* be right and necessary for us all to labour in this respect, perhaps above all others almost, to seek out what is well-pleasing to our LORD and Master, and then to act up thereto, be the consequences what they may.

— And in like manner, of those who are in profession Church-people, it greatly indeed concerns us, more doubtless than we are aware, to take care that our churchmanship is well founded—*i. e.* founded not on mere fancy or prejudice, or self-interest, but on a thorough conscientious desire to do what is acceptable to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and so to be a true member of the Church, which is His body,

As to the dream and delusion of an internal unity without external—of people being united in faith and love who will not kneel down together at the same altar—this need only be mentioned to be set aside as what I said it is, a mere dream and delusion.

But then unity, though essential to the Church, is not every thing in it: there must be doctrine and discipline as the LORD hath commanded, and if in any branch of the Catholic Church



there is any falling away or deficiency in either of these respects ; the duty of each member is not to separate and depart from the body, but to use all holy and lawful means to restore things to their primitive state, so far as may be. Whoever does this with humility and caution, out of pure love to the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and seeking only His glory, such an one acts on true Church principles ; his ambition and his labour is according to St. Paul's rule in the text, that whether present or absent, whether successful or not in his wishes and endeavours, he may at least be approved and accepted of His SAVIOUR.

But chiefly and above all things, does it concern the sincere member of CHRIST'S Church, to keep watch over himself and his own heart and conduct, to remember that as in Holy Baptism his body was made, as St. Paul says, the temple of the HOLY GHOST ; so in the other Holy Sacrament, the benefit, whereof he and all faithful Christians are partakers, is no less than the Body and Blood of their adorable SAVIOUR.

These thoughts, I say, make the sincere churchman look on himself and his condition with awe and fear—with awe when he considers the greatness of his privileges—with fear, lest he should do any thing to forfeit them.

Nevertheless these fears do not overcome him, and get the mastery of his feelings, but still he goes on with the Apostle in the text, labouring and endeavouring that, whether present or absent, he may be accepted of His SAVIOUR.

—Perhaps, now, some person may think this is a poor kind of life, to be always labouring and endeavouring to be acceptable to GOD : it would be better surely for us to know that we are accepted, and then we need fear no more, nor labour no more. To this we can only say in answer, St. Paul thought it necessary to labour, that whatever befel him, he might be accepted of His adored LORD : surely then it must be as necessary for us, unless we would pretend to be wiser and better than that most illustrious Apostle.

It may in some sense, and to the eye of the world, be a poor kind of life to be for ever endeavouring and labouring to please an unseen Master. Nevertheless that Master is our GOD and SAVIOUR ; except in HIM we can have no hope either now or

through the great approaching eternity. HE is so kind as to watch over us ; to be pleased when we endeavour to please HIM—to be grieved when we neglect or disobey HIM. Is it then a poor kind of life to spend it in the service of such a great and glorious Master, and one, too, on whom all our dependence must be, as we cannot deny ?

Rather, I should think, it is a poor kind of life, to rest satisfied with what we are, to be afraid of being righteous overmuch, but to have no fears of being righteous overlittle ; to desire chiefly to *feel* safe and secure of Heaven, without regarding much the strict and holy rules of CHRIST and His Church. Thus to go on in a half religion, is, indeed, a poor kind of life.

But to labour like St. Paul from day to day, whether present or absent, in happiness or in grief, to be accepted of our LORD and Master, to do every thing with a view to please HIM, to make His will our will, His displeasure our displeasure : this, whatever it may be in the world's opinion, is to the eye of faith and of pure religion the noblest of all courses ; and yet, too, the only one that it is safe for any individual to follow.

—It is plain then, from what St. Paul says, that a life of labour, of earnest endeavour to please our LORD JESUS CHRIST, is the sort of life we ought all to be leading. If we are not so endeavouring, we are unworthy of the great name of Christians.

Every body almost will say the times are bad, and not without reason. The faithful member of CHRIST'S Church must, therefore, rouse himself to new, probably, and peculiar trials fast approaching. He must not lie idle, and think that nothing is to be done in the holy cause of GOD and truth ; nor again, in false humility, is he to think that he can do nothing.

Every one can labour, that whether present or absent, whether apparently successful or unsuccessful, he may be accepted of his LORD and Master.

Every one can endeavour to know more of the nature of the Gospel and of the constitution of CHRIST'S Church Catholic, than he does at present. Every man can endeavour to follow more steadily the rules of that branch of the Church to which we profess at least to belong. Every one can endeavour to be more consistent in his religion, not to profess one thing and practise

another ; not to mind being laughed at, scorned, and pitied ; not to give up good practices hastily, because we do not find all at once so much comfort or advantage as we expected from them,—to be more than ever strictly honest, punctual, temperate, kind, forgiving, charitable, devout, self-denying, dead to this world, and resigned to the disposal of our Heavenly FATHER and REDEEMER.

These things we can endeavour and labour after, and only so far as we do endeavour and labour after them are we worthy to be accounted members of CHRIST'S Holy Catholic Church, and of the Communion of Saints, so far only have we right to expect to be admitted hereafter to the blessed company of Angels, of Apostles, and Martyrs, of the spirits of just men made perfect, of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

—Things cannot long continue as they are going on now, that is quite certain.

Some great changes of necessity must take place ere long in the external condition of the Church among us. The tide sets, as it were, strongly, not so much against particular opinions as against the truth wherever it shows itself. Against this the majority are plainly united, as indeed they always have been.

But this need not disturb us. What ought to disturb us is the recollection that we have not laboured as became us as Christians and as churchmen (if such a distinction may be made) that, whatever befalls us, we may be accepted of our Great LORD and Master.

Let us then in this respect repent and amend. Let us cast off all selfishness, all indolence, all mean cowardly fears, and set before ourselves as the single object of our anxiety to be and to do what will be pleasing to our gracious and adorable REDEEMER.

In such labours and endeavours we shall not in the end fail of success, by the promised aid of the HOLY SPIRIT, the Giver of life.

I say, we shall not in the end be disappointed. But at present we must not look for much comfort or immediate reward, but be contented to bear the burden and heat of the day ; any of those peculiar trials and afflictions which the true member of CHRIST'S Church must expect to have laid on him.

And then, from time to time, he may refresh himself by thinking what good men of old time have endured in the same holy cause, and be thankful if he may be at all permitted to be like them, still remembering the ancient words of holy encouragement.

“ They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.  
He that now goeth on his way weeping,  
And beareth forth good seed,  
Shall doubtless come again with joy,  
And bring his sheaves with him.”

## SERMON LVIII.

### LOFTY AIMS AND LOWLY DUTIES.

I COR. xv. ult. xvi. 1.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the LORD. . . . Now concerning the collection for the saints; as I have given order for the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye.”

It is of considerable use for those who wish to understand the full force and meaning of various parts of Holy Scripture, still to bear in mind, that it was not originally divided into chapters and verses as we now find it in our Bibles. The division into chapters was made about 600 years since, and that into verses not till two or three centuries after. Now, though these divisions are, in more than one respect, of great advantage, it will nevertheless be well for us constantly to recollect that they were not so placed by the inspired writers themselves, and that there are few verses or chapters which will not be better understood by reference also to those which go before and those which follow.

Let me call your attention to two or three, among many instances, where verses or chapters run as it were into each other.

In the affecting history of Joseph and his brethren, the sacred narrative is (as it were) interrupted at the end of the 44th chapter. Judah finishes his address to his (unknown) brother, saying, “How shall I go up to my father, and the lad not with me?—lest

peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father." "Then," *i. e.* at the thought of his father's distress, "Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him."

In the account of the conduct of the hypocritical prophet Balaam, that the full force of this most edifying portion of God's word might not be lost, the Church has appointed that both the twenty-third and twenty-fourth chapters shall be read as one lesson, viz. on the second Sunday after Easter.

Again, the seventh chapter of St. John's Gospel ends as it were in the middle of a verse. "Every man went unto his own house, but JESUS went unto the Mount of Olives."

In St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians at Colosse, giving (as we find in the third chapter) special directions to persons in various relations in life, to husbands and wives, children and parents, servants and masters; by this modern division the direction to masters, instead of being, as one would expect, the last verse of the third chapter, appears as the first verse of the fourth.

And to say no more, that the Church does not consider the division into chapters and verses of any essential importance, may appear from reference to the Prayer Book—to the Gospel for the Sunday after Ascension Day, and to the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle on St. James's Day; as also to the Gospel for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity: from all which it will appear that we need not be very scrupulous in attending to such divisions into chapter and verse, but of the two, rather lay aside our regard to them, when we are seeking to ascertain the force and meaning of any particular passage of God's Holy Word.

It is also worth consideration, that besides those many places where the sense or meaning of any chapter or verse is as it were incomplete, without passing on to the chapter or verse following, there are also still more to which most valuable light and illustration may be obtained, by comparing and contrasting with them what has gone before or comes after. As to mention only one or two instances—a person reading or hearing the last chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, or of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, might, in a light careless mood, think himself excused if he derived no great edification from them. The conclusion of the Apostle's letter to the Romans, (such a one might say) chiefly consists of mere messages to different friends: and that to the

Corinthians of notices and instructions about matters of mere local or temporary interest, no way concerning us of these latter days. But persons who so think or speak must be distinctly warned; first, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" and *as such*, is never to be heard or read but with sincere awe and reverence. In the next place, this inspired Word of God is *also* "profitable, variously, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." It is always profitable: if we are not profited by it, it is our own blame and loss; its tendency universally is to make "the man of God," the Christian, "perfect—*i. e.* throughly furnished unto all good works." Particularly, in the last chapter to the Romans just referred to, how much matter for reflection is there, to say nothing else, in the mere fact, that the inspired author of this so grand and divinely magnificent Epistle, should take so much pains to mention by name and with words of kindness and Christian courtesy where needful or suitable, various persons whose condition in this world doubtless was very low and obscure, and of whom all that could be said was, that they were sincere members of the Church and Body of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

And so with respect to the chapter to which the Church directs our thoughts this day, we may observe that the great Apostle had just before been calling the attention of his Corinthian converts to subjects as awfully mysterious, and yet withal as practically important, as any which could be offered to men's consideration.

He had been solemnly reminding them of the truth and certainty of the great doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead; and in the course of his argument had (in the wisdom imparted to him by the HOLY SPIRIT) uttered or rather committed to writing, things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

From the question of the half-unbelievers, "How are the dead raised up? With what body do they come?" the Apostle takes occasion to reveal high and awful truths concerning the last resurrection, "Such as eye had not seen nor ear heard, nor had entered into the heart of man to conceive, but God had revealed them to him by His SPIRIT."

|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| "It is sown in corruption, | It is raised in incorruption.   |
| It is sown in dishonour,   | It is raised in glory.          |
| It is sown in weakness,    | It is raised in power.          |
| It is sown a natural body, | It is raised a spiritual body." |

“There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body; and as we have worn the image of the earthy, we shall also wear the image of the heavenly.” And then presently he proceeds to state particularly, some more of the awful circumstances, which as a prophet, he was enabled to foresee concerning the last Advent of the LORD JESUS.

“Behold! I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep. But we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

“And when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” Adding what may perhaps be considered as a most divine Hymn or Anthem—

“O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?  
The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law.

But thanks be to GOD which giveth us the victory through our LORD  
JESUS CHRIST.”

And then, after his manner, the Apostle subjoins his solemn practical warning, by way of inference from the great doctrinal truths he had been setting forth.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always, uniformly, abounding in the work of the LORD, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the LORD.”

Passing on to an exemplification of, or mode of putting in practice at once this thankfulness, this stedfast, uniform, accomplishment of the work of the LORD: “Concerning the collection for the saints,” or poor Christians, “as I have given directions to the Churches of Galatia, even so do ye; on the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store” for this charitable purpose, whatever he can afford, “as God hath prospered him.”

He afterwards speaks of his intended journeys, and of his hope to come and spend some time with them; mentions by name various friends, with a particular request that every kindness and attention should be shown them, interspersing here and there solemn hints (as it were) of what should be ever in a Christian’s thoughts, however employed. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done



with charity. If any man love not the LORD JESUS CHRIST, let him be Anathema maranatha."

On reading then, and comparing these two chapters together, we see that the Divine knowledge and lofty privileges vouchsafed to the illustrious Apostle St. Paul, did not in any way prevent or keep him back from fulfilling, what may be called, his course of every-day duties. One moment he is descanting on the highest and most magnificent doctrines of the Gospel; the next, laying down rules for managing a collection for the poor, or arranging the order of his visits to his flock or friends, and so forth.

We also see on the other hand, that the great Apostle's attention to these common duties, did not at all draw off his heart and affections from his heavenly privileges, and true home. "All his things," to use his own emphatic expression, "were done with charity," with "love for the LORD JESUS CHRIST," and of all men for His sake.

It becomes us then, as disciples of the same Divine Master, to endeavour, by the aid of the Everblessed SPIRIT, to follow the illustrious Apostle's example in both the ways now referred to. When we search into, and meditate on, the truths of CHRIST's glorious Gospel, we should never make this an excuse for being negligent of the peculiar daily duties belonging to our several stations.—And also on the other hand we should be careful, that in fulfilling these duties, we be not forgetful of our high Christian privileges.

On each of these points let me offer a few observations by way of caution.

People sometimes think, or speak as if they thought, that if they give their minds in any considerable degree to matters of a directly religious nature, they must be so far the less competent to take their part in matters of business or society, properly belonging to their respective stations.

Yet we see that St. Paul, to whom was granted in so eminent a degree "the gift of prophecy, the power to understand all mysteries and all knowledge,"—this great Apostle and Holy Minister of JESUS CHRIST, was constantly most active and diligent (no one more so), and at the same time most discreet and prudent in fulfilling all the duties of that state of life to which it had pleased God to call him. Hence we may conclude that habits of sincere unaffected piety, the habitual study of GOD's Holy Word, and

regard to the rules of His Church,—the “continuing in prayer (as St. Paul expresses it), and watching in the same with thanksgiving,” with the Eucharist, with habitual Communion with our LORD JESUS CHRIST at His own Holy Table,—a life so led is quite compatible with the uniform practice of all the daily duties suited to our respective stations.

If some high emotions of feelings were absolutely requisite to put the heart into a truly religious frame before God, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain an uniform spirit of religion ; to pass at once, for instance, from prayer, or communion, or the study of GOD’S revealed word, to matters of domestic or social duty.

But as St. Paul has set us the example we need not scruple to believe, that the proper way of turning to account the high knowledge and privileges imparted to us as Christians, is to be “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the LORD,” and at once to enter on what comes first in our line of duty, *i. e.* to us “the work of the LORD”—each man’s proper calling.

At all times indeed, but especially in the present corrupt and decayed state of what is called the Christian world, the temptation to serious and contemplative minds is to withdraw from this restless unsatisfying scene of things, and to let their hearts and minds dwell on those noble privileges and rewards, which, by faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, they are enabled to call their own, either in possession or in hope.

They would willingly shut their eyes to the matters which concern only this transitory life, and look only to the great subjects which belong to them as of right—as members of the Church of GOD which HE purchased with His own blood,—as, namely, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

To these great matters, and others of kin to them, they would willingly limit their thoughts. But they know they must not—they know that they are required to use this world, as not abusing (or rather, as not using) it ; to follow the path assigned them with utter indifference as to what the results may be ; not to seek high things for themselves, but to be content to go along low by the ground ; to be content, I say, as the Catechism so admirably expresses it, “to learn, and labour, truly to get their own living,

and to do their duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call them."

In times also of distress and affliction, from whatever cause arising, it is a great trial to tender and devout spirits to go on engaging themselves in matters of common every-day business. It seems to them almost as if there were something wrong and even presumptuous in so doing; as if God were speaking to them, and they refused to hear.—And this the more because they too often see worldly and hard-hearted persons pursuing this very course, deadening (as it were) the sound of God's warnings in the noise of business or pleasure.

Nevertheless the sincere Christian must be assured, that in time of affliction, as at all other times, it never can be wrong to go on stedfast, unmoveable, always, *i. e.* uniformly abounding in the work of the LORD. He must not look on things too much after the outward appearance. The other disciples, yielding perhaps to their feelings, went away, not enduring to behold their LORD's suffering.—St. John remained at the foot of the cross and saw the nails driven into His hands and feet—and the spear thrust into His side.

And when Christians carry to the grave the mortal remains of their brethren, the Church, consoling us with the glorious doctrine of St. Paul in this very chapter, does not omit the last verse, the practical conclusion of the whole. She seems to warn us not, under a natural touch of feeling, to waste our precious time yet remaining, and the more precious for being so uncertain, in sorrowing as others that have no hope, but to proceed at once "in the collection for the saints," in the prosecution of those various duties which every man knows, if he reflects at all, that he has on his hands every morning of his life.

But while we endeavour to follow on, however imperfectly, this our path of daily duty, it is of the most serious importance that we bear in mind, at the same time, the high Christian privileges to which the members of CHRIST'S Holy Church are entitled.

People may go on leading a decent, respectable, and what is miscalled, moral course of life, without giving their thoughts with any habitual seriousness to what their LORD and SAVIOUR

has wrought for them, to the need they are in of having their hearts in all things guided and ruled by the HOLY SPIRIT.

I say, it is a mistake to call such persons "moral" men, they are very immoral; they neglect their best friend; they disobey their Master in whose service they are sworn; they constantly promise what they do not even try to perform.

It seems therefore no less than necessary for us, if we would be acknowledged as good and faithful servants of the HOLY JESUS, that we apply our hearts to search into, and ascertain the great concerning truths of the Gospel. These truths are meant for all persons, of all stations and circumstances; they are not limited to men of learning and scholarship, nay, not offered to them, unless they bring as humble and teachable a spirit as the meanest Christian.

But with such a temper of lowliness and devotion, with habitual prayer for the instruction and guidance of GOD'S blessed SPIRIT, with diligence in reading and hearing His Holy Word, especially according to the ancient rules provided by His Church, and with making the most of that leisure which all are able to enjoy at least on the LORD'S sacred day,—in this way the sincere Christian, be his condition in life what it may, will still as each week passes over him become more substantially wise, even with the wisdom which proceedeth from above; will still (as the Apostle speaks) be growing in grace and in the knowledge of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Nevertheless, at the best and wisest in this world, we see but as through a glass, darkly and by reflection.

The time will come, when those who have sought their SAVIOUR aright in this world of trial, shall find HIM—shall ever be with HIM—yea "shall be like HIM, for they shall see HIM as HE is."

## S E R M O N   L I X .

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### THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT.

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ST. MATT. XXV. 25.

“ I was afraid : and went and hid thy talent in the earth.”

It seems, on consideration, of great importance towards the right understanding and application of many, or perhaps I may say, of most of the parables of our Blessed LORD, that we regard them as prophecies, or rather as prophetic warnings, valuable indeed to Christians in every age of the Church, but especially to us of these latter days. For as time goes on, and seems in a manner to take us on farther from the source of evangelical light and truth, the “ word of prophecy,” according to its nature, still grows clearer, and becomes, as St. Peter expresses, more and more “ sure ;” sure, *i. e.* to us, both to encourage and to guide us in this “ dark place.”

For, I suppose, we, looking back on the history of the Christian world for many centuries past, and witnessing its condition at the present day, in this and other nations, are able to perceive the force of many of our SAVIOUR’S prophetic discourses, and especially of His parables, more clearly even than many of those disciples to whom they were originally addressed.

At all events, the warnings contained in these parables could not have touched the consciences of the first Christians more closely than they must ours, so far at least as we have a serious

sense of our real condition, and of the state of CHRIST'S Church militant here in earth.

To the first Christians it was a *prophecy* that the Gospel of their SAVIOUR should be as good corn scattered in a field, of which only a small proportion falls into good ground and brings forth fruit.

To us this is matter of history, observation, and experience.

To the first Christians it was a *prophecy* that tares should spring up among the good corn, and that the servants would be impatiently anxious to make the separation, sooner than their Master would think well.

How this prophecy has been fulfilled, the history of the Christian world, in past and present times, may well bear witness.

To the first Christians it was a *prophecy* that the Christian faith should be as a grain of mustard seed springing up into a great tree. We are able to imagine from what we already know, that at no distant day the earth shall be filled with at least *the knowledge* of the glory of the LORD.

And to refer to one more only of our LORD'S parables ; to the first Christians it was a *prophecy* that persons who had received, and who knew that they had received, from their LORD and Master talents and advantages, more or less valuable, to be accounted for, would nevertheless deliberately set them aside as worthy of no care or regard at all, and as though they should never be called to account respecting them.

That things should be so in the Christian Church, the Omniscient and Holy JESUS expressly foretold. That things have been and are so, we must, alas ! all of us see and confess, if at least we will not be wilfully blind, and regardless of the prospect which is spread before us.

—The last parable, as it seems, which the SAVIOUR of mankind delivered while on earth, was the following :—

“ A man travelling into a far country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his several ability : and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made other five talents. And he that had received the two, he also gained other two. But he that had received the

one went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money ;" did not misspend it, but merely hid it.

"After a long time, the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents, behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His Lord said unto them, Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

"And he also that had received the two talents came and said, Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me two talents ; behold, I have gained two other talents beside them." Here we observe that he which had made the best use of his two talents was welcomed by his Lord in *exactly the same* gracious words as he who had the five. "His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

"Then he that had received the one talent, came, and said," in a bold unhesitating manner, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed, and I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent in the earth ; lo, there thou hast that is thine." I have spent none of it. I have made no use of it, either good or bad. Take it again as thou gavest me. I now owe thee nothing.

—We may well believe that among many other prophetic warnings of the greatest value implied in this parable, this is one, that as Christians we are in danger, through pride and indolence, of neglecting to turn to account God's *common* mercies and privileges ; yet deceiving ourselves and others all the while with a pretence of humility and unworthiness, and extreme fear and awe of the Divine perfections.

It may seem that the servant in the parable was secretly displeased that while of his fellow-servants, some had five talents, and others two, he should be only entrusted with one. So he made up his mind that it was not worth taking any trouble about ; that if he should try any scheme of improvement and not succeed, his master, whom he chose to call without reason, "a hard man," would be very angry, so it would be safer to go at once

and bury the talent in the earth, taking all chances for the consequences.

Thus, I say, does our merciful SAVIOUR warn us to make the most of whatever talents are intrusted to us, however small, and in the world's opinion contemptible, and not, with a pretence of fear and humility, to encourage secretly the fatal kindred dispositions to indolence and pride; ever remembering the end denounced against *him*, who is here designated not as proud, or envious, or disobedient, all of which doubtless he was, but as an "unprofitable servant," one who did not try to make the most of what was intrusted to his charge.

We observe then, that this man, when he was called to account for the manner in which he had employed his talent, endeavoured to excuse himself, by alleging the fear and awe he had for his Master. "I was *afraid*, (says he) so I went and hid thy talent in the earth." As much as to say, if I had had five talents intrusted to me, or even two, I might have accomplished something worth laying before thee, but with only one poor talent I was *afraid* of attempting any thing, for I was sure I should fail.

Here, I say, seems to be set before us a solemn warning against cherishing any unworthy fear, or rather pretence of fear, which would keep us back in our several stations, from turning whatever talents our Merciful God may intrust us with, to the intended account.

People very often think what they would do if they were placed in a more influential situation, if they were more wealthy, or more clever, or more learned, or in any respect more skilful, or were naturally better tempered, or had been blest with more vigorous health, or more even spirits.

I say, feeling our deficiency, as almost all must in some one or more of these respects, we are in danger of cloaking our indolence or our vanity under the disguise of humility, and because we know we cannot succeed so well as some others, to profess ourselves afraid to attempt any thing in the special service of our LORD and Master.

For instance, the poor widow in the Gospel, who when many that were rich cast in much to the offerings of GOD, threw in two mites, being all she had, and for that had the distinguished honour



of being commended by her SAVIOUR and Judge Himself,—I say, if this poor widow had been of the disposition of the servant in the parable, she might and would have said, I was afraid to give so little, so I gave nothing. And so doubtless it is to this day, persons are often afraid to subscribe small sums even to purposes which it is their duty to support, and which they highly approve; they are afraid (they say) they shall do more harm than good to the cause, and get laughed at instead of thanked, and so forth. Now if we look a little more closely into our motives on these occasions, we shall generally find a lurking spirit of vanity, or perhaps of covetousness, which deceives us under the cloak of fear and humility.

Or again, though it be not so generally considered, yet without question there *is* one precious talent, gift, and privilege, within the reach of us all of this country, which the majority of persons nevertheless, in the spirit of a vain and false fear bury in the earth, and this is the privilege of Church-membership, with its accompanying graces and duties.

Thus many persons think, or at least speak and act as if they thought, that the question of Church Unity was no concern of theirs, very proper for the clergy and learned men, but quite above the reach of the generality of Christians.

Many are afraid of committing themselves by over-strictness (as they call it) in some particular instance, because they are fearful (they say) they shall bring disgrace on religion by not being consistent in other respects.

On this plea many persons, among other things, are unwilling to begin or keep on with the sacred duty of family prayers; many refuse or decline to kneel down when they are in this house of God; and on the same principle many systematically refrain from even intending to partake of their REDEEMER'S Body and Blood at His own sacred table; and all these things people do on religious grounds, so they flatter themselves. But if they could be prevailed on to examine more closely and candidly into the motives which really influence them, they would find them to be near of kin to those which led the unprofitable servant in the parable to profess so boldly to his Lord, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." Far from that true "reverence and godly

fear," with which alone, as the Apostle to the Hebrews intimates, we Christians can "serve our God acceptably."

—It is also very observable here, as in innumerable other places of the New Testament, how emphatically we are warned, that whatever blessings or advantages we possess are not our own, but our Heavenly Master's, intrusted and deposited with us now, and strictly to be accounted for in the end.

Of this the servant in the parable was fully aware; for (says he) "I was afraid, and went and hid (not *my* talent, but) *thy* talent in the earth."

Applying this to our own case, we shall perceive that it is a very false and unholy fear indeed, which, in any case, keeps us back from employing the precious gifts of God to the honour and glory of HIM who bestows them.

Our whole time, the years, months, weeks, and days allotted to us in this transitory life; this our time, I say, is not in any sense our own, what we have a right to employ simply as we please. It is God's time intrusted to us, and we may not dare, under the notion or plea that it is not worth His acceptance or beneath His regard—we may not, I say, deliberately venture to waste or mispend it. It is one of our LORD and Master's most precious talents given in charge to us, and if through false fear we hide it in the earth, we can expect at last no other than the heavy doom of the unprofitable servant.

So, again, the blessing of a Christian education, in greater or less degrees, is a talent of great value, committed to us by our Heavenly FATHER; that is, it is of great value to us, if we turn it to its proper use; but if we apply our knowledge to evil purposes, or employ it not in any way to God's glory, under a notion of its inferior importance, we shall find, in the end, that we have dishonoured God in one of His best gifts, and must look to be requited accordingly.

And, indeed, whatever blessing we enjoy, either of nature (as it is called) or of grace, the only true way of considering them all, is as of talents divinely intrusted to us, and for which we "must give account in the day of judgment."

This thought should make us all, whatever our station in life may be,—I say, it should make even the poorest people, as well as

those in middling and high stations, very serious and earnest in their religion, that is, in their whole conduct. For there is no one who will not have many talents to account for; no one, too, who will not need the mercy of his SAVIOUR and Judge for his sad misapplication of them.

—However, as we must not venture to stand idle in our Christian course, but must still be endeavouring to do somewhat in God's cause, however poorly and imperfectly; it must be well for us to keep a constant guard against the two evil dispositions before referred to, which, if cherished, will, above all others, tend to make us, in this probationary world, "unprofitable servants" of our Heavenly LORD, and, hereafter, outcasts from His everlasting favour and love. I need scarcely name these two dispositions, as all persons who have exerted themselves at all earnestly in pursuing the narrow way which alone leadeth unto life, will acknowledge, that the temptations to Indolence and Pride, above all other the snares of our spiritual enemies, are powerful to draw us off from following our one only God with pure hearts and minds.

We must not then, through sloth, and a mean unwillingness to exert ourselves in God's cause, when fit occasion offers,—and such occasions are for ever suggesting themselves to the sincere Christian,—we must not, I say, shrink from the trouble, and go and hide our talent in the earth, be that talent in the world's opinion or our own of ever so small value.

For instance, the Holy LORD's day, though by all faithful members of CHRIST's Church it must be made a day of rest, yet should it never be made a day of idleness. Most persons of every station of life of necessity have their thoughts and time in a good degree occupied by worldly matters through the week, and some much more than is necessary.

However, on Sunday even the world will give them leave to turn their minds to higher and substantial things, to meditation on the work and will of our GOD and SAVIOUR; for instance, parents have a noble opportunity of instructing themselves, while they endeavour to instruct their children, and ought not to think that every thing is to be done at schools.

The Sundays of men's life are not so many as that we may afford to waste any of them. The Christian sabbath is rest, not

idleness. And if we act on any notion different from this, under a pretence of keeping it more strictly, we are like him who said so boldly, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."

—Nor again if we are at all in earnest in our Christian profession may we venture, through any feelings of low unworthy pride or vanity, to stand back from doing what we can, be it ever so small, and (in the eye of the world) contemptible, in the cause of HIM who has done so much for us.

True Christian humility and self-denial would rather lead us to be employed about matters which will bring us no worldly credit, than such as we are most sure of accomplishing successfully, supposing, of course, that they both come into our line of duty. Present success is no evidence of God's favour.

—Nothing then remains, but that beseeching GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT, that HE would in all things direct and rule our hearts, would guide and support us all along our difficult path, we henceforth be so diligent as not to be self-confident, so humble as not to be indolent and slothful.

Then will that gracious SAVIOUR, who died to purchase a pardon for penitent sinners, save us from the miserable doom of the unprofitable servant, and in His infinite compassion, accept us as not unworthy even of "the Great Name wherewith we are called."

So will those things please HIM, which we do at this present; the rest of our life hereafter will be pure and holy; and at the last we shall come to His eternal joy.

# SERMON LX.

THE SINNER'S WISH IN THE WORLD OF SPIRITS.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. LUKE xvi. 27, 28.

“ Then he said :—

“ I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment ”

As there are many important truths which seem to be offered to the contemplation of thoughtful minds in this remarkable part of Sacred Scripture, so the one which I now desire to turn your attention to, is of a very touching nature.

For it appears to be no less than the truth, that the spirits of those who have departed this life, and who are waiting each in their state of hope or dread the final irreversible sentence of the last day,—I say that these spirits of our friends, neighbours, and relations, who have gone before us through the valley of the shadow of death, have, in some mysterious way, the power of knowing how those whom they have left behind them are going on—at all events the power to feel an anxiety for their spiritual good, a fear lest by their life and practice they should forfeit God's everlasting favour.

For you will observe that this account of the rich man and Lazarus, which is not related by three of the Evangelists, but only by St. Luke,—this is not called a parable, and therefore may, for any thing that appears to the contrary, be a real history,—

the history, that is, of some particular individuals who lived in Judea, and were lately dead when our LORD thus described them.

“There was,” HE said, “a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and enjoyed himself sumptuously every day.

“And there was a certain poor person named Lazarus, who was cast down at his gate full of ulcers; and earnestly desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover even the dogs used to come and lick his sores.

“And it came to pass that the poor man died and was carried by the Angels into Abraham’s bosom,” the most favoured seat, that is, in Paradise, and among the spirits of the just.

“The rich man also died and was buried,” that is, had a grand and expensive funeral.

“And in hell,” that is, in the place of departed souls, “he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, resting on him, soothed and comforted.

“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

“And besides all this, there is a great chasm fixed between us and you, so that they who would wish to pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us from thence.”

Then, perceiving his own case to be thus wretched, he began to think of those whom he had left behind him in the world; “I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldst send him to my father’s house,” the family mansion (as we should say), “for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”

We seem to be here plainly taught, that the souls of persons departed have a knowledge of the conduct of their surviving friends, and an anxiety for their condition in the eternal world.

The man spoken of by our SAVIOUR had, it seems, five brothers, younger probably than himself, and to whom in his lifetime he had set a bad example, nor cared at all how they went on.

But when he had passed the boundary, and seen and felt the *reality* of God's judgments, in the world of spirits; then, to add to his woe, he could not but reflect on the wicked courses which had brought himself to that miserable state, and would, he knew, bring his brethren also, if they would not consider their ways in time, and return to their God while yet it was in their power.

Such is the view of the case offered to our serious thoughts by our SAVIOUR and Judge Himself. That it does indeed demand to be seriously thought of by all sincere Christians, no one can deny or doubt.

For in the first place, we are hereby warned that such persons as depart this life *not* in God's faith and fear, whatever they may suffer besides, in (what may be called) the natural course of the Divine Judgments, have also the misery of remorse, arising from the consciousness of the blessed opportunities they have lost.

We seem, as I said, also to be hereby taught one of "the secret things of the LORD our GOD," namely, that the souls of the departed, even of those who have led wicked or careless lives, do feel an anxiety for their friends whom they have left behind them in this evil world, and that they would if possible send to them to warn them of their danger. But this, as it seems, cannot be, that is, is inconsistent with the course of God's moral government: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets;" if they refuse to listen to the voice of God's Church, "neither will they be persuaded," though a messenger were sent from the grave to warn them of the dangerous consequences of their conduct; "neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Now then, as to the latter of these topics, let me offer a few considerations.

Suppose the case, alas! the too common case, of persons going on from year to year in the open deliberate neglect of all true religion, entirely regardless of the Gospel of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, as if it were at length discovered to be a mere set of falsehoods, or if true, no concern whatever of theirs.

Now persons who are leading this kind of life—and multitudes of such there are—if reasoned with on the danger of their course,

would say at once they see no danger in it,—that many of their friends and relations before them have lived and died in this sort of way, and, for any thing that appears to the contrary, no harm has come of it. Therefore they mean to go on as they are; and, they dare say, God will be merciful to them, whatever the *bigots* may say.

To such persons it might be said—How do you know that the condition of those of your acquaintance or relatives, who led such a life as you are leading and died in it,—how do you know that they are now in a state of peace and rest?

Rather, if you could hear them speak out of their graves, would they not most certainly entreat you (like the unhappy man mentioned in the text) to take warning betimes, lest you also come into their “place of torment?”

Would they not say—We now look back on our worldly irreligious lives, and wish a thousand times over we had spent them differently. We call to mind our contempt of God's service, His holy days and holy places; we think of Sundays misspent, of prayers neglected, of the Scriptures disregarded, of the scorn and mockery which we have cast on the ministers and Church of the LORD JESUS, and would give worlds for the opportunity which you possess of leading a life devoted to His service. Thus doubtless would many departed spirits, if it were possible, offer their earnest warnings to their surviving friends and relatives, whom they see (perhaps), or at least fear for, as going on in the evil courses of which themselves set the example.

But their desire will be in vain; no voice is heard from the grave. If men will not hearken to the warnings of the LORD, speaking to them outwardly by His Church, and inwardly by their conscience, then nothing more can be done. No miracle will be wrought to convince those whom truth, and reason, and natural affection had for years and years pleaded with in vain.

If they hear not Moses and the Prophets under the Old Covenant, and the LORD JESUS and His Church under the new, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

—Again, we may too easily suppose the case of very many Christians, not altogether neglectful of religion, but still so fond of this world, so readily giving way to their passions and tempers, so unwilling to be checked or controlled, that really and in practice



they pay almost as slight a regard to the strict rules of the Gospel as if they were professed unbelievers.

Such persons also might easily enough plead the example of others, living and dead; they might mention friends and relations long since perhaps deceased, who, they are sure, were quite as worldly-minded, quite as hasty or ill-tempered, quite as unwilling to be corrected or controlled as themselves; and then why should they pretend to be better than such, who, they doubt not, were very religious, good sort of people, with all their faults.

Now this way of speaking or thinking is by no means uncommon, even with persons in some respects seriously disposed; yet it is really presumptuous, irreverent, and profane.

To such persons it might be said—Perhaps your departed friends think differently of your condition from what you do yourself. They, without question, now feel themselves, and they wish you to feel, the infinite difference between that religion which will satisfy “society” (as it is called), and that which is vital, substantial, practical.

They would tell you, that the love of this world, and the cherishing of evil tempers and dispositions, and the being unwilling to practise self-denial, and a dislike of humble lowly obedience; that these things are fatal to the precious interests of the soul, though possibly some external forms or internal feelings of devotion (or what is called devotion) may be all the while kept up. Against such delusions the spirits of the departed would warn us (if they could be heard), and would entreat us to practise as well as profess the renouncing of the world with its pomps and vanities; to keep down resolutely every tendency to ill-temper and unkind feeling, to deny ourselves daily and habitually, to practise all lowliness, meekness, and obedience.

“Keep innocency (they would say), and take heed unto the thing which is right, for that shall bring a man peace at the last.” Harken not to any person who would delude you with the treacherous fancy that there can be true faith in the blood of your REDEEMER, without positive obedience to His declared will.

—And here I may just touch on another important point which what I have now alluded to seems naturally to suggest. People too often talk very confidently about their neighbours, friends, and relations;—I mean, about their being gone to rest, though

possibly there might be great faults and errors in their course of life, or their views of Christian truth.

Surely it is better to think than to speak on such awful mysterious topics. The Church commits the bodies even of her most unworthy members to the grave, with a hope that they may rest in JESUS, and over the graves of the most saintlike she ventures not beyond a hope. She draws no lines of distinction, but leaves that to the omniscient Judge.—Certainly it is natural that we should wish to have some assurance of the happiness of our departed friends—but neither Scripture itself, nor the ancient interpreter of Scripture, I mean the Catholic and Apostolic Church—any where that I know of authorizes us to look anxiously for any such *assurance*. And the reason perhaps is plain to an humbly-disposed mind; namely, because if there were any certain mark or sign by which that assurance could be obtained, we should either fancy we ourselves had it, and then grow presumptuous, or else fancy we had it not, and so sink into despair. Most wisely, then, and most mercifully does the ALMIGHTY keep the great secret from us—nay, forbid us to search into the matter—because our own business is from day to day to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

And then you see, if we were sinking down with despair, we should not be disposed to “work” at all—if we were presumptuously confident, we should not work “with fear and trembling.”

When, then, we think, of our departed brethren, we may well pray with the ancient Church, that when we ourselves depart this life we may sleep in the LORD, as our hope is they do. But the language of confidence and assurance, whether as regards them or ourselves, is far better avoided—at the best, living and dead, we are miserable offenders, and have no hope but in God’s mercy through CHRIST JESUS.

—What, then, we should endeavour to do, I mean in the way of realizing to ourselves the great mysterious truths taught us in the wonderful portion of Scripture, appointed as the Gospel for this morning by the ancient Church—seems to be of this kind. We should think of our departed relatives, friends, and acquaintance, not for the sake of arousing painful and morbid feelings of grief, nor yet to cherish superstitious fears and fancies about them or about ourselves—but as we would of absent per-

sons, whose conduct we would wish either to imitate or to take warning from, as the case might be—and yet not as certainly absent either, since for any thing we know to the contrary, they are aware of the course of life we are leading, and are watching us.

The eminently-learned and pious Bishop Jeremy Taylor, in his admirable *Rules for Holy Living*, gives his advice, that when we are unable to sleep at night from pain or restlessness, our thoughts may well and profitably be turned to the spirits of the departed.

“Meditate (he says) on the four last things—the certainty of death—the terrors of the Day of Judgment—the joys of Heaven—the pains of Hell, and the eternity of both—” Then adding—“Think upon all thy friends which are gone before thee, and pray that GOD would grant to thee to meet them in a joyful resurrection.”

Such is the advice of that wise and holy prelate, in full accordance with the rules of the ancient Church and primitive fathers. And beset as the minds of sincere Christians now are, on the one side (as one may say) with the excesses of Popery, on the other with the defects of what is called “Protestantism”—it is a great consolation to be able to fall back on the rules and practices of our first fathers of the apostolic age—more especially when those rules and practices are (as, of course, if authentic, they must be) in beautiful harmony with the dictates of natural piety, and especially with the tone and voice of the Ever-blessed SPIRIT, speaking to us in the Holy Bible.



## S E R M O N L X I.

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THE CHURCH PRAYER-BOOK A SAFE GUIDE.

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2 TIM. i. 13.

“ Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in CHRIST JESUS.”

It is generally considered that it is a great blessing to have the Bible among us ; but it is hardly at all considered what a blessing it is to have the Christian Church, such as it was in all material respects in the beginning, and such as it will be unto the end. And yet it cannot be doubted, that not in the Scriptures alone, but in the Church also, there is manifested the wonderful power of GOD : that GOD is especially present in it, the FATHER, and the SON, and the HOLY SPIRIT, in whose Name we are baptized, to direct, and to sanctify and to save each true living member of that Church.

Nor is the Church to be considered as distinct or different from the Bible ; but the fact is, that it is the Church which not only conveys down to us and explains, but also brings home to us the Holy Scripture itself, in a way that would not otherwise be the case. For instance, the great mysteries of our faith are not only laid up in the Scriptures, but the Church sets them one by one before us, at different seasons of the year, in a manner most forcibly to arrest our serious regard : as our LORD’s birth at Christmas, His painful life through Lent, His death and rising

again at Easter. Even if we knew these we should never otherwise consider them in the practical and distinct manner that we are now enabled to do.

The Creed, again, is another inestimable gift of God which we have in the Church: without it we should not be able to explain much that is in the Holy Scriptures, and we should not know what was most important in them to our salvation. The Apostles' Creed may be considered a sort of key to the Bible, which God has furnished us with together with it. For if the sacred Scripture is left to be explained by the unrestrained devices and fancies of men, there is no notion too absurd for them to pretend to establish from it.

In short, the ALMIGHTY has provided us with a guide, for which we cannot be too thankful, in the Prayer-Book. To say that it is not the Bible, and therefore not to value it or attend to it, is a very unthankful way of rejecting one of the best blessings which has been bestowed upon us. It is the same kind of thing as when persons pay no regard to religious duties on a week-day, because it is not Sunday; whereas they would keep the Sunday much better, if they attended more to religion during the week; and in like manner they would understand and observe the Bible much better, if they attended more to the Prayer-Book.

The Prayer-Book is not indeed so old as the Bible, but great part of it is nearly as old as the Christian religion itself. It has not been made to-day or yesterday, but has been, for the most part, taken from old Liturgies; and some of these old Liturgies were known under the names of Apostles: one was called that of St. Peter, one that of St. James, another that of St. Mark, and another of St. John, in early ages.

Take for instance the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels, for of these I would chiefly speak at present. It is *proved* that the Collects have been in the Church of God, most of them, for nearly fourteen hundred years; and the Epistles and Gospels, mostly as they now stand, for nearly twelve hundred years; and, no doubt, both of these have been from even earlier times, for they are thus traced up to the pure and better times of Christianity.

Now surely this is a very inspiring and comfortable thought, that our Sundays and Festivals bring to us those particular

lessons which they have brought to our fellow-Christians for so many hundred years. Christian piety would teach us to turn our thoughts to the dead in CURIST, and to consider ourselves as united with them; and these things may assist us much towards such contemplations. And not only with regard to the dead, but towards the living also—towards other members of the Catholic Church—this consideration cannot but be very interesting to us, and a great bond of brotherly union and sympathy. It is a comfort to think of other Christians in the most distant parts of the world;—that however we may differ from them in many points of our belief, and however we may think that they have corrupted the ancient faith by new inventions, as the Roman Catholics have done; yet have they not only been admitted into one baptism with ourselves, and drunk of the same Spirit, but on these holy days have many of them the same Collect, Epistle, and Gospel with ourselves.

Though earthly distinctions separate us, yet in things divine we are made to be all one with them. As far as this world goes, the curse of Babel is still upon mankind, and we are divided by different languages and interests. But in the Church the blessing of the day of Pentecost may rest, and the SPIRIT would teach her children to have, as it were, one language of the heart, and to understand each other.

We know that GOD is the Author and Lover of concord, of union, not of division; and surely such things must be pleasing to HIM, which tend to promote the holding of the faith “in the unity of spirit, and in the bond of peace.” And I will add, “in righteousness of life” also, which the Church would always combine with the other two, and would teach us to pray for, in addition to “the bond of peace and unity of spirit.”

For, of course, every attempt to promote peace and unity, without righteousness of life, and a sincere adherence to the truth, can only end in confusion.

Now it is evident that the Prayer-Book has especially a tendency to promote the holding of the faith in righteousness of life; and that not only by its sober and devout Prayers and Services, but by its appointed passages from Holy Writ, in the Epistle and Gospel to which we have alluded.

It might be supposed that if we have the Bible itself in our hands, that such extracts, as it were, might be selected at any time, which would equally well serve for the purpose. But surely this is not the case, for persons might select passages from Holy Scripture, here and there, which they might in some measure make to speak their own language. If some new doctrine in religion, some new gospel, as it were, should become popular, then they might only take such places in the Scriptures as might seem, taken singly, to countenance it, and set aside other portions which would prove that they were wrong.

Such has been the case in the present day. The opinion now prevails (whether right or wrong), that they who teach, and have taught for 1800 years, the necessity of holiness of life above all things, and obedience to JESUS CHRIST, as the one thing which alone is needful, have quite mistaken the true nature and meaning of the Gospel.

This opinion now prevails; and when it has had its day, some other opinion of another kind will, very likely, become popular, and prevail. And each will in turn be made to speak the language of Holy Scripture, by taking one part of it and rejecting another. Nor is this to be wondered at; I mean that opinions which are not true should be able to do this, for we know that Satan never so effectually deceives, as when transformed into the appearance of an angel of light. And, therefore, principles may not be true, which yet may have many passages of Scripture apparently to support them.

And now if we are only to go by the preacher and not by the Church of God, we may take up unsound principles in this way, some false religion that obtains in the world; and it may be even such as to endanger our salvation, and never come to a right sense of the truth before we die, if such opinions last through our own day. If this were our condition, then it would not be the case that the Church of CHRIST is founded upon a rock, as we know that it is, but upon the sand, or upon the waves of men's fancies, and tossed about by the winds of strange doctrine.

But we may be very thankful that this is not the case with any of us who still remain in the bosom of the ancient and Apostolic Church. Our Faith does not depend on the doctrine of any



preacher, or of any set of men, but on what St. Paul calls "the pillar and ground of the truth, which is the Church of the living God."

Whether the minister teaches what is faithful and true or not, for of course he is liable to be deceived like other men, yet the Church always speaks the same language, and has always one voice; whatever changes may take place in this changing world, she is in some sense even like her own blessed Author, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

She teaches you to-day with the same lessons, and teaches you to pray to God in the same "form of sound words" that she did your fathers, and those who died a thousand years ago.

And if we do not forsake her, nor tempt God to remove her from us, she will continue to teach your children's children the same. The gates of hell shall never prevail against her, neither shall they prevail against any who have kept to her teaching and guidance, and fulfilled those vows which they have at their baptism made to God through her.

Very sad opinions may have sway both in politics and in religion; but the Church will ever quietly teach the truth, without ever looking to the right hand or to the left. Of the HOLY SPIRIT who dwells in her, it may be said, as it was of the Church in which HE dwelt of old, "The LORD is King be the people never so impatient; HE sitteth between the cherubims be the earth never so unquiet."

And this is one great advantage in the teaching of the Holy Church, that popular impulses which prevail do not affect her one way or the other: her instruction is ever quiet and peaceable. From the beginning to the end of her sacred year, she continues to bear witness against that world into which she has been received; unfolding one by one her great mysteries, and the doctrines and practices connected with them; ever labouring to maintain "the form of sound words in faith and love which is in CHRIST JESUS."

She teaches us throughout the season of Advent to prepare speedily for judgment, as for that which is even now close at the doors, although the world and its false religions would teach us that we have time enough, or that we have no reason to fear it. However we may be taken up with exciting projects, or lulled in

a fancied security, her still small voice of eternal judgment, and of CHRIST "coming quickly," will ever be repeated to us.

Or, again, however we may be given up with dissensions and divisions, as if they were of little consequence among Christians every Christmas that returns, the Church has the same angel's voice which came from heaven, saying, "Glory to God, peace upon earth, and good-will to man."

And again, through the whole season of Lent she will always call upon us to mortify the flesh, to fasting and to repentance, although there may be many now, who will tell us that there is no need of such unpleasant duties, and our own hearts, alas! are too ready to believe them.

Though some of the most sacred days of the year may become greatly forgotten or neglected, as Holy Thursday, or Ascension Day has been, yet not the less on that account, though even her very Ministers are silent, yet her ancient services still remain as a witness, calling upon those who will attend to her, not to forget so great a part of their Christian Faith, but to have their conversation in heaven, whither JESUS CHRIST has gone before them, and in heart and mind thither to ascend, and dwell continually with HIM.

Although some would tell us that there is no occasion for such strict obedience, if only we are susceptible of such feelings as they call Faith, and men of the world are secretly pleased with such a notion, and look favourably upon Religion for the sake of it, when the offence of the Cross is thus done away with;—though it be difficult for us thoroughly to see through the vanity of such thoughts,—yet the Church, without looking to the opinions of men, on one side or the other, always teaches us the commandments of God.

Indeed, no sooner has she set before us all the mysteries of our religion, from Advent to Trinity Sunday, than, after that, during nearly half the year (the Sundays after Trinity), she urges upon us (in every possible way that can engage our attention, awaken our hopes and our fears, and above all our love to God, who has done so much for us), Sunday after Sunday she impresses upon us the necessity, the absolute necessity, of our being conformed to the life and death of CHRIST by obedience.

In what beautiful order during this season of Trinity do he

Collects arise on our course, one after another, like an angel taking us by the hand, and leading us to our heavenly Canaan : now opening to us, as it were, a view of our celestial country, now urging us on our way, now supporting our weakness and comforting us in our infirmities, in all things teaching us practically to look to God only : as we “ go through the vale of misery,” these are indeed “ pools filled with water.”

Or, moreover, if we look to her occasional Services, there are some who say there is no new birth in Baptism ; others will arise and say, that there is nothing holy in Marriage ; others, that there is no reverence due to the bodies of departed saints : but here in all these things our heavenly Guide will not deceive us.

And all the while the great weight of her evidence consists in this : that she only unfolds the truth as it is in CHRIST, she has no prejudices to bias her, no human interests to serve.

If her Ministers be carried away by prevailing errors ; if they should teach nothing more than outward decency, and such a regard to good principle and character as would satisfy a low standard of duty, putting as it were in the back-ground, and out of sight, the Cross of CHRIST ; as perhaps we have done : yet, notwithstanding, if any one would look to the Church, she was still the same witness, the same light set on a hill, the same still small voice to guide those who would be guided by her.

And now again, if people will rush into the opposite extreme, and satisfy themselves, and make others satisfied with a naked, barren faith ; while the Church, the candlestick of God, remains to give them light, it is their own fault if they are deceived.

Again, the Church is calculated to produce in us good habits, in distinction from mere good wishes and intentions ; habits of daily prayer, habits of obedience to those set over us of God, which is the foundation of all true piety, instead of the old heathen notions of false liberty.

But above all things the Holy Church has within her, in every way, the only remedy against our own evil nature ; she, by the aid of the HOLY SPIRIT ever present with her, applies the medicines provided by Divine power and goodness, against our poor, frail, human infirmities. For we are all inclined in some way or other to trust in ourselves ; but she leads us to look always to something beyond ourselves, and to trust in God only.

This she does not only by her weekly Collects, of which there is perhaps not one but what teaches us practically to trust only in the Mediation of JESUS CHRIST, and in the continual help of His SPIRIT—but more than all, by teaching us not to look to any fancied good works of our own;—not to any supposed faith of our own—not to strong affections—not to preaching, which is to trust in man—not to any sect or party;—but to CHRIST coming to dwell within us at His two most holy Sacraments.

These are alone all our strength, all our grounds for hope and pardon, if we soil not that baptismal robe with which HE has been pleased to clothe our nakedness, nor by evil thoughts wilfully defile that Temple in which His holy feet have trod, but “working out our salvation with fear and trembling,” from our being assured by the seal of these Sacraments that “it is GOD that worketh in us.”

Now, as we grow older, and look back with shame and sorrow upon our many past offences, we may find that in all points in which we have fallen short in faith and practice, it has been in neglecting the injunctions of the Church, in forsaking her the guide of our youth, and not giving heed to her voice.

To the young, therefore, and especially to those who are now before the Church, about to take upon themselves the solemn engagements of their Baptism, and who are consequently looking forward for that help and blessing which has always attended “the laying on of hands” in the Church; what other advice can we give in these dangerous days, than to exhort them, earnestly to cleave to this gracious guardian, which GOD has provided them with in His Church?

They know full well, that the way which the Baptismal Service and the Catechism has marked out to them, is a narrow way, and in which there are but few that travel. And they know that such is the way, which our blessed SAVIOUR has told us is the only way to life.

They must therefore, if they would be saved, dare to be singular, they must not be ashamed or disheartened from living up to the vows they have made, because other people do not.

They must labour, as the Catechism has taught them, to love GOD with all their heart, and soul, and strength; they must not be

depending upon a late repentance, nor waiting for any call or conversion; but as they have been instructed, must serve HIM truly all the days of their life.

Whatever may be the practice of others in these days, they must remember, that they have been taught to honour and obey the King, “to order themselves lowly and reverently—to submit themselves to spiritual Pastors—to do their duty in the state of life in which GOD has placed them.”

They must take the Prayer-Book for their guide, they must practise themselves to a frequent use of its prayers, in studying the Psalms, and, if possible, in reading some portion at least of the lessons which she appoints daily.

Above all things, they must remember that whatever others may do, nothing can ever justify or excuse them before GOD, from absenting themselves from that Holy Table where the Catechism has assured us that “the Body and Blood of CHRIST are verily and indeed taken and received.” In a matter of such infinite importance they must take heed how they are influenced by either the indifference or the scorn and ridicule of others: remembering those awful words, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of ME and of My words in an adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the SON of MAN be ashamed when HE cometh in the glory of His FATHER with the holy angels.”

## S E R M O N   L X I I .

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### CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF HIS WORSHIPPERS.

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ST. MATT. xviii. 19, 20.

“ I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My FATHER which is in heaven.

“ For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.”

WHEN we consider the great promises which are made to prayer ; and particularly the great blessing attached to public worship, which the words of the text imply : when we consider, moreover, how sacred and almost divine the prayers of the Church are, and how those prayers themselves are almost in a manner sanctified, and made more acceptable by the holiness of the places in which we meet together ; it is surely a matter greatly worthy of inquiry, how it is that Christians in general derive so little benefit from the prayers of the Church, in comparison with what they might in all reason be expected to do.

There must be a great falling off or mistake somewhere to account for this : the promises of GOD are sure and infallible ; there can be no failing on His part ; and His promise is, that “ every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” And not only does the ALMIGHTY never give less than He promises, but always more.

Nor can there be any fault in the prayers themselves, for they are in every respect calculated to be most availing; they are prayers for things which we know are truly good and profitable for us to receive; they are prayers in the Name of CHRIST, to which the additional promise is made, that whatever we ask the FATHER in His Name, HE will give us: they are also the prayers of Christians united together in making the same request, to which another promise is given; "If two shall agree together respecting any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of MY FATHER which is in heaven."

And this will appear more clearly, if we take the prayers in detail. First of all, they may be considered as confession. The first prayer we make is a long prayer of confession, wherein we acknowledge ourselves "miserable offenders"—to have done what we ought not to have done, and to have left undone what we ought to have done. Now, how many promises does this at once entitle us to; how does it at once put us in the place of persons who, as we read in Holy Scripture, received benefits and blessings? We have often express assurances such as this, that "if we confess our sins, HE is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." And so very ready is our Heavenly FATHER to watch the very first returns, however feeble, of such confession, that even when the wicked Ahab humbled himself and showed signs of humiliation, GOD hastened, as it were, to remove and suspend His judgments. No sooner did David after his fall confess to the prophet, "I have sinned against the LORD," but Nathan answered, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin." And in like manner, when the prodigal son, in the parable, had resolved to return and make this confession, his father is already looking out for him and hastening to meet him.

When we come to Church, and approach GOD with this confession, there we stand, as it were, at once in the place of that Publican, who went up to the temple to pray, and returned to his house justified, or accepted in the sight of GOD, rather than the Pharisee. Our confession expresses that temper of mind which our LORD has marked in this parable as most acceptable to HIM. When we come to Church with this prayer, we put ourselves as much as possible in the position of that person in the Gospel, to

whom our LORD said, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee:" and of that repenting woman to whom HE said, "her sins which are many are forgiven." And this the Church itself teaches us, in that after this confession the Minister, whom CHRIST has commissioned to bind and to loose in His name, then solemnly pronounces absolution and forgiveness.

Now it really cannot be supposed that persons who come to Church do *in any adequate way* partake of these benefits and blessings: I would not say that they who daily, or weekly, thus confess their sins in Church are not better and happier for so doing; it is to be hoped that most are so. But it may safely be said that the good which they derive does exceedingly fall short of the promises of GOD: that the benefit they do receive is nothing in comparison to what they ought to receive: and that is the case with the very best among us. Very great as the blessings are which they do thus obtain, they are little indeed, when considered with respect to the vast promises which GOD has made, and the abundant measure with which HE is apt to bestow.

And if this is true with respect to the confession, it is equally as much so with those many other prayers for mercy or for future blessings, with which the Prayer-Book abounds. There is no evil which we can be subject to, but we pray to be delivered from: there is no spiritual grace or religious attainment which we do not ask for in the Litany or in the Collect. Why therefore do we not attain them? what reason can be given for it? the promises are unfailing and unlimited, "whatsoever ye ask ye shall receive." Many of these requests too are made in the very words which we know were heard and accepted in Scripture, as when we pray GOD to "*have mercy on us,*" in the words of the woman of Canaan; or appeal to CHRIST as "*the Son of David,*" in the words of the Blind men. These requests were in their case answered, and what reason can there be why they should not be equally answered in ours? CHRIST is equally near to us as HE was to them, for where two or three are gathered together in His name, HE is there in the midst of them. It cannot be otherwise than true, for they are His own words; and HE is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." What peace of mind, what grace and virtue is there; what best wish is there which thought could devise, but that we have prayed for it week after



week, and many of us day after day, for years? And have we done this in vain? are there not strong and sure appearances of these things in our life and conversation? If not, there must be a great fault somewhere: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that He cannot hear."

And again, consider how much there is in the Prayer-Book of intercession—of prayer for others; there is no neighbour, no friend or relative we have, but we may include them in our prayers at Church, if we would. At one time we pray for those who are in danger, necessity, or tribulation: and at another time for those who are sick; at another, for orphans and widows, and prisoners. At another for our enemies and slanderers: at another, for those who have erred and are deceived; or for those who are strong in the faith; or for the weak-hearted; or for those that fall. At another, for those who are any way afflicted in mind, body, or estate. Now every person probably knows some one or more, who come under each class here described; so that besides praying for all generally, whom he knows not, he may pray also for some particular person in each of these prayers. And how much good he might do by this practice, no tongue of man can tell; the Judgment-day alone can declare it. As certain as the Bible is true, so surely by these means might any single person benefit his neighbourhood, his friends, his acquaintance, more substantially than by any earthly riches, although it might not be known in this world, nor before that time when all secrets shall be revealed. And when we consider how many in the Gospel were benefited by the prayers of others, how many were restored from sickness, because their friends interceded with CHRIST for them, we may well suppose that the welfare of many around us, who are not able to come to Church, may greatly depend on our observing or neglecting these duties.

And there is much of intercessory prayer in our daily service, not only for private individuals, who may or may not be known to us, but also for the whole Church and nation. It may indeed be the case that no prayer will avail with God for a nation which is opposed to His Church, for He has declared that "the people who will not serve her shall be utterly wasted," but still such prayers cannot be lost; if they cannot save the unrepenting

nation yet they may save ourselves, and be restored to our own bosoms; they may work that for us which we most need, a temper of loyal obedience and resignation. And with regard to the Church, consider it only in this one point: the Church does not indeed signify the Clergy—but consider how much depends on the Clergy—how many thousands of ignorant and wilful men might be brought back to CHRIST'S fold, if they have many and good ministers sent forth among them. This all men allow and speak of as a matter of no doubt, and confess its importance. But let us consider what our blessed SAVIOUR did at this sad sight, of men being lost for want of teachers; it is said on one occasion, "When HE saw the multitude, HE was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." When we read this we may well inquire, how was it that our LORD did not Himself send forth ministers among them to teach and convert them. But it seems that this, whether Pastors should be sent forth to them or not, did depend upon the prayer of others. For to this it is added, "Then said HE unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the LORD of the harvest, that HE will send forth labourers into His harvest." Now we may most reasonably suppose that this is precisely the case with us at present; and that the Clergy depend on the prayers of the people, who, and how many they are, and how they live. And for this the Church has fully provided, in that for four weeks in the year, the ember weeks, she offers up daily prayers for the Clergy; that fit persons for the sacred office be chosen; and that they may by life and doctrine serve the great ends of God's glory and the salvation of men. And, therefore, if any one ever complains of bad ministers, he may fairly be asked, has he ever in earnest prayed with the Church for good ones.

Another point to be considered in the Services of the Church is thanksgiving—now how much GOD watches whether we give thanks or not for the blessings HE bestows on us; and how much pleased HE is that we should, we may learn from our SAVIOUR'S notice of the ten lepers, out of which only one returned to give glory to God. And although among the prayers of the Church we have only one of General Thanksgiving, yet the Psalms consist, partly indeed of prayer and confession, but particularly of

giving thanks—there is no spiritual or temporal good, but we may give thanks for it in the words of the Psalms.

Besides these things, we never come to Church without repeating the LORD'S Prayer more than once; and we are sure that no prayer can be more acceptable to GOD than this, and none can express more fully all that a sinner needs and ought to ask for. And if we repeat it three or four times, we have reason to suppose that it has more power with GOD for this reason, as in that we approach most near to our LORD'S own example, for we know that our LORD in the time of His agony prayed three times, using the same words.

But it is not only to hear their prayers that CHRIST is present in His Church, where two or three are gathered together in His name; but also to absolve them from their sins, and to dismiss them with His blessing. In like manner as when HE appeared among His disciples, the doors being closed, and said, "Peace be unto you, My peace I give you: not as the world giveth give I unto you." And when HE gave commission to His disciples, saying, "Whatsoever house ye enter, first of all say, Peace be unto this house; and if the SON of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it."

Now it may reasonably be supposed from all that we read in the Gospels of the ALMIGHTY'S readiness to hear all requests, that persons who use such prayers must partake of all the best gifts which GOD has to bestow. If Simeon and Anna, who walked blameless in all the ordinances of the LORD, and came day and night to the temple, did at last find CHRIST there when HE was unknown to all the world besides, much more might it be supposed that Christian worshippers by coming to Church constantly, will there find CHRIST manifested to them, for HE has promised to be there in the midst of them.

All this being the case, there must be some great fault in those who come to Church, if they should fail of these blessings, so vast and wonderful. And doubtless it is because persons come to Church without consideration; they neither think of GOD, nor seriously concerning themselves. Of course words of confession can be of no avail with GOD, when those who are there do not try to think of what they are saying. For them to declare that they are miserable offenders, because they have done what they ought not

to have done, cannot obtain God's favour and forgiveness, unless they reflect on what they have done wrong, and do seriously intend by God's grace never to do the like again. Otherwise, of course, confession is nothing at all, unless it be something like a mocking of God. Nor can it be right to say we have left undone what we ought to have done, if we never intend to do those things we lament to have omitted. This will very well explain how it is that many receive no benefit from confessing their sins in Church; and not that God fails of His promises, which is quite impossible. For many do not in Church even show the outward humiliation of Ahab, do not even kneel down when they pray, nor think in Whose house they are; but sit unconcerned, as if they only came to Church to hear others pray, or to hear the sermon. Of course these cannot partake of such great benefits.

And the same may be said of all those things we pray for in the beautiful Collects and affecting Litany: to say them without trying to think of God is but doing what our SAVIOUR has told us we must not do, that is "using vain repetitions." And if our prayers can do ourselves no good, because they are said in this thoughtless, careless way, surely they can do others no good; and our prayers for so many others are also lost. The sick are not supported; they who are in trouble are not comforted; they who are in danger are not succoured, so much as they would otherwise be, because we are too careless to think of them in Church.

And not only do we lose present blessings by being thus negligent to ask them of God; but when we come to Church it is like an opportunity afforded us of laying up in store comfort and support for future times and the hour of need. It is the season for putting on the armour of God for the day of battle,—for preparing for the time of temptation. For instance, we pray in Church that God will deliver us "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment." Now it cannot be supposed, that these prayers, if faithfully used, are to go for nothing: doubtless in that time when we shall most need assistance, and when we shall have perhaps no power or time to pray, these prayers will be remembered; such petitions now, in the time of our health and strength, arise up as a memorial before God, and are kept in His treasure-house against the time of our great need. This may be considered as

the seed-time and that as the harvest : if we neglect to sow we cannot expect to reap ; and “ he that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously ; he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly.”

It may indeed be almost impossible for any one to shut out the world from his thoughts when he comes to Church, if he is very much taken up with it at other times ; but then when he finds that he is not able to pray on account of wandering thoughts, this ought to remind him that he is in a dangerous and bad way, that there is something wrong in his way of going on. For he may be quite sure if his mind is too distracted to wait upon God, that he is serving another master. I do not know any thing that may serve to tell a man what his condition is in God's sight, so much as the state of his mind at prayer : whatever it is that most distracts him at his prayers, he may be sure is that point in which his great enemy has most power against him. And therefore it is evident that our prayers depend upon our manner of life. No one can express wants he does not feel : but he who most feels his want of assistance from God, will be sure to pray aright ; he will find at once that the prayers of the Church exactly suit his case ; their language gives utterance to all his desires ; he is relieved and comforted, and comes to know with the patriarch that “ the LORD is of a surety in this place,” according to His promise.

We cannot doubt but that the words of the text do contain a great and assured truth, that, over and above the usual and sure benefits of prayer, where “ two or three are gathered together” in Church, there CHRIST is “ in the midst of them,” in some mysterious and life-giving manner beyond understanding : present to hear their prayers,—present with Divine power to bless them and give them His peace. And yet it is very certain that few come to the knowledge of this truth, and herein is fulfilled that saying of our LORD's, when His disciples asked HIM how it was that HE would manifest Himself to them and not to the world ; for HE said that if any man would keep His commandments, HE would manifest or show Himself unto him. It is therefore now as it was of old, when CHRIST appeared, HE was rejected by some, despised by others, by others persecuted, and by another betrayed, and to people in general unknown ; neverthe-

less, to those who gave themselves up to follow HIM, HE was made known. They came to a full assurance of the truth ; they put CHRIST's words to the proof by acting up to them, and found them true, as every one now may do : they felt they had no one else to go to for support and comfort : thus St. Peter said, " LORD, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life : And we believe and are sure that Thou art that CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD."

According as any man lives so does he pray : as far as he lives aright he will pray aright ; and by prayer—serious and devout prayer—men are brought into some mysterious nearness to the ALMIGHTY GOD ! they feel beneath them and around them " the everlasting arms !" Many who know the great promises which Holy Scripture has attached to prayer, and that " every one that asketh receiveth," very little avail themselves of this privilege at present, but think that they will pray and derive this support in the time of affliction and death. Thus it is that the evil spirit deludes them, well knowing that if he can but get them to defer habits of prayer in this their day, that they will not be able to pray when they most need it. And therefore GOD has mercifully warned us, that if we refuse to hear when HE calls, HE will mock when our fear cometh ; His HOLY SPIRIT will leave us, and when we have no one else to look to, HE will be far from us.

## S E R M O N   L X I I I .

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### THE LAND OF PROMISE.

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ST. LUKE x. 23, 24.

“Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see : for I tell you that many Prophets and Kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them.”

BLESSED indeed were the Prophets and Kings of old, to whom the coming of CHRIST was revealed at a distance ; who, like faithful Abraham, “ saw it afar off and were glad.” But they were not to be accounted blessed in comparison with those Apostles who themselves beheld His sacred Person, and heard His divine words. Blessed indeed were those favoured Apostles ; and yet perhaps even they were not to be accounted blessed, when compared with faithful Christians now in the Church, who have the Comforter to be with them ; for CHRIST Himself said that it was expedient for them that HE should go away, in order that the Comforter might be with His Church. It was therefore better to be in His Church after His death, than with HIM in the flesh. Blessed therefore are those baptized Christians who now eat His Flesh and drink His Blood. And yet they are not to be considered blessed compared with those who have left this world and “ sleep in CHRIST ;” for with respect to them who are now with GOD, those who are still in the flesh at their best estate are to be accounted miserable. For a voice out of heaven has declared, “ Blessed are the dead, which die in the LORD,” blessed are they, that is to say, in comparison with the living.

Thus is it ever with the people of God, that however great are the promises made to them, yet there is ever something higher and better in store for them than all that has been given : however great are the blessings foretold and given for the present, yet there is ever something far greater beyond,—and, as St. Paul says, after all that has been given, “there remaineth a rest for the people of God.”

And the reason is because God is infinite ; in Him there are no bounds nor limits—there is ever something further for those that love Him and His word—men give that which is best first, and afterwards that which is worse ; He ever keeps that which is best to the last, and of Him it is said, “but Thou hast kept the good wine until now.”

Thus Noah received his name, which signifies “rest or comfort,” because it was said of him, “this same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.” And truly he was as such “rest and comfort,” because he was a type or shadow of Christ. Rest and consolation was with him in the ark, when considered with respect to those that perished ; and afterwards when the covenant of God was established with him. But still when he stood almost alone in a world which had been destroyed, we cannot consider him, in the midst of the terrors of that dreadful judgment, as blessed in comparison with those who found rest in the land of Canaan, under their own vine and fig-tree, and in the temple of God.

Thus also was it with the patriarch Abraham ; he was called of God from out of the nations unto a land that God showed him ; and there he received great wealth, and almost every earthly blessing, with the promise that the families of the earth should be blessed through him. Highly favoured indeed was his condition who was called “the friend of God,” and who for his faithfulness was allowed afar off to see the day of Christ. But yet we are told that in that land of promise he was as in “a strange country,” considering himself that is as a stranger and sojourner, “for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Thus was it also with the children of Israel when they had been brought out of Egypt, the house of bondage, unto that



mount which GOD had showed them: "HE led them through the deep as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble," "the SPIRIT of the LORD caused him to rest." But yet their rest in the wilderness, though fed with bread from heaven, and carried as it is said by GOD Himself as it were on eagles' wings, was but sore travel compared with that land of promise—the land flowing with milk and honey, to which they were travelling.

But yet afterwards, when they had arrived at this, their long-promised inheritance, the land of Canaan,—being led thither by Joshua, that is the same as JESUS, their SAVIOUR and DELIVERER,—that country of which such great things were spoken, and which was a type and figure of the heavenly Canaan:—though their lot was indeed blessed, when compared with that of those who died in the wilderness, and with that of all other nations in the world, yet how little like any thing of solid rest or peace was theirs? Their best hope and consolation was still nothing else than to look forward to a happier and better day, and to those far better promises which were held out to them in the coming of CHRIST. Even in that favoured country of GOD they had no rest for the sole of their feet.

And now we have our SAVIOUR's own words for the far greater blessedness of those that saw His day, than that of all those Prophets and Kings who had gone before them. For then indeed were all those promises fulfilled which had been made from the beginning of the world: all the promises and the blessings which had been given were but shadows, and semblances going before, of this blessed day. All the deliverers that had been raised up from time to time, from this circumstance alone derived all their strength, that they were types of the one Great Deliverer. The world had only continued in existence ever since the fall in the hope of this happy day. The eyes of all good men from the beginning of the world had been looking forward to this day of days, and longing for it on their death-beds. So much was this the case, that many could find rest in nothing else; and one who had lived long enough to see this day, was then ready to die, saying, "LORD, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

And now we all are those blessed persons who live in this state

of which such great things have been spoken. But we also, when we compare our condition with that which is to come, we, like our fathers before us, from the beginning of the world, are but like strangers and sojourners, beset also, like the Israelites in the land of Canaan, with many enemies, with no solid rest or peace, and no hope of any in this world,—but by our very profession “looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God.” And as all the blessings going before from the beginning of the world, were but types of this our Day of salvation, in which CHRIST has appeared among us in the flesh—so is this our state also only a shadow or type of that great day which is yet to be revealed, when the SON of man shall again appear in the power of His unspeakable Godhead. Thus are all mankind in all their succeeding generations led on, as it were, from strength to strength, until we come to the mount of God.

And now this being the case, we shall find that Holy Scripture, in speaking of one state, always speaks at the same time of another which is to come. Thus expressions that were first of all spoken of the land of Canaan, were also intended of that better inheritance—our Christian state, the true Canaan; for, in fact, they are not so applicable to the earthly Canaan, though they were first spoken of it, as they are to the Christian covenant. Thus, for instance, the true Joshua is JESUS our Deliverer; the true cities of refuge are the Evangelical promises; the land of olive-yards and vineyards is the oil of the HOLY SPIRIT’S anointing; and JESUS CHRIST is the true vine of this Christian dispensation. Of us more particularly is it said, “they gat not the land in possession by their own sword, neither was it their own arm that helped them.” Of us in a higher sense than of the first Israelites is it written, “what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all the things that we call upon HIM for?”

And in like manner as it has been said that the country which GOD gave to the Jews of old was only a type of the peaceable kingdom of the MESSIAH, and those high Christian privileges under which we live; and this the Christian dispensation itself only a type and shadow of that better kingdom which will be in heaven; so is it also the case that expressions which are applied to the condition of Christians on earth, have also a further and

fuller reference to their condition in heaven, of which the visible Church on earth is but a type or shadow.

Thus, for instance, the expression of "the kingdom of heaven;" or "the kingdom of God," often occurs in the Gospels, and it is evident that it often means merely CHRIST'S kingdom upon earth. As when St. John the Baptist preached "the kingdom of heaven is at hand:" and where in a parable it is likened to "a net cast into the sea, which gathered of every kind," both good and bad, which could not of course be said of that heavenly kingdom hereafter, into which nothing unclean shall enter. Or where it is likened to a treasure hid in a field, or to a field sown with both tares and wheat, which most closely describes the nature of CHRIST'S kingdom upon earth, but not that in heaven. But at the same time it is to be observed, that this expression of "the kingdom" frequently seems to allude also to the future state of Christians in heaven, as well as to that on earth; as where it is likened to a grain of mustard seed, which being the smallest of seeds, becomes the largest of shrubs; for although this description is applicable to the Christian religion spreading from little beginnings over the world, yet who cannot see within it also an allusion to that faith, which may be, we are told, as a grain of mustard seed, yet is of very mighty power, though its workings are unseen: which is so small here on earth, that he who possesses it, is scarce to be known from another to the eyes of man; but when it comes to its fulness in heaven, it will be so great as to fill eternity. In like manner in the LORD'S Prayer, when we say, "Thy kingdom come," we mean first of all, the spread of the Gospel upon earth, and in our own hearts, but we also mean that better kingdom, which shall be above.

Thus is it the case with almost all expressions that are applied to the Christian state, they are used like that one which we have been now considering. Thus the Church of GOD sometimes means that body of men on earth who have been baptized into the name of CHRIST, and feed on HIM at the Lord's Supper, hearing the word, and having such other blessings as they derive from HIM, through His appointed Ministry; sometimes it means the invisible Church in heaven, that glorious BRIDE "without spot or wrinkle;" that City into which "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth."

In like manner the words "called," and "elect," sometimes merely mean those who are called and elected into the Church upon earth; as where it is said, "many are called," in distinction from the few who are chosen. And where St. Paul calls all Christians "the elect of God," though he tells them they are in great danger of falling. Sometimes, both these words are applied to those who are finally saved, as in the book of Revelations, "them that are with HIM are called, elect, and faithful." The same may be said of the word "saints," and other such expressions, as, they "whose names are written in heaven." All these things have two significations, sometimes applying to the Church below, sometimes to that which is above.

The same is the case with expressions in the prophets, respecting CHRIST'S kingdom: they first of all apply to the Gospel, but also and more fully to the future state of the blessed. As where the prophet Isaiah says, speaking, as it would seem, of the coming of CHRIST in the flesh, "that men had not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen what God had prepared for him that waiteth for HIM." And surely no Israelite to whom these words were first spoken, could have formed any conception of the mercies of GOD which are revealed to us in the Gospel, and hid in CHRIST: these words were indeed very amply fulfilled in His condescensions upon earth. And these things St. Paul says, that "GOD hath revealed unto us by His Spirit." And yet who does not see that these words, which spoke to the Israelites of the marvellous blessings and privileges of our Christian covenant, do to us more particularly apply to those good things, which God hath laid up for those who shall be with HIM hereafter?

Another instance, out of a great many which may be mentioned, is, where it is said in the prophet Malachi, that the LORD shall suddenly come to His Temple; "but who may abide the day of His coming?" We know that these words were fulfilled when CHRIST appeared in His temple at Jerusalem, when so very few could abide that His mysterious coming; but who does not perceive that they are also a prophecy of His appearing in His Church in the day of Judgment?

The same may be said of numberless expressions which are applied in Holy Scripture, to baptism and baptized Christians;

they are said to be "dead in CHRIST," and to be "risen with CHRIST," to "sit with CHRIST in heavenly places:" they are said to have come already, by baptism, unto "Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living GOD, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." But who does not see that all these descriptions, which are spoken of the Christian estate in this world, and its inconceivably great privileges, do also in their higher and deeper meanings apply to their state in the next, of which, as we observed, this present state is but the shadow?

Thus baptism is called the new birth, or regeneration, and baptized persons are spoken of as having "put on CHRIST," as wearing white robes, "which is the righteousness of CHRIST." But these expressions are also spoken of the next world; for our SAVIOUR thus applies the word regeneration, "in the regeneration when the SON of MAN shall sit on the throne of His glory;" which, although it may signify the Christian dispensation as it now is, yet speaks more particularly of the new kingdom hereafter. So that there are two regenerations, one at baptism, the other at the day of Judgment: and, in like manner, they who are "arrayed in white robes," which they have "made white in the blood of the LAMB," are the redeemed who are with GOD.

And following the example of Scripture, the early Church used to apply to death and to baptism the same words: the death of a martyr was called the baptism of blood, and the day on which martyrs suffered was called their birthday, and kept under that name.

Thus we find throughout GOD's dealings with mankind, that persons have been continually called to one state, which was to prefigure, and set forth beforehand, another which was to follow, as the land of Canaan was the figure of the Christian inheritance in which we stand. And expressions concerning one were mixed up with those concerning another, which was to come after, in order that they might draw attention to it, and that the fulfilment of the first might lead on people's minds, and be an assurance to them that the other would follow. In the first they see, though it be but through a glass darkly, that which is to succeed.

In these things we may perceive the great certainty and fullness of GOD's promises: time passes on, and men for the most part are so engaged with passing circumstances, that they see but

very little before and after ; nevertheless, according to the Word spoken, in its own good time it comes to pass. To the ALMIGHTY all things are present—the times that divide them and make them to us appear afar off, are nothing to HIM—a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years; and at the same time, and in the same words HE speaks of things a thousand years apart, and binds them up in one.

To them of old HE ever spoke of a future dispensation which was to be on earth by CHRIST's coming ; to this HE ever turned the eyes of faith ; this HE bound up in all the promises HE made to them ; but to us HE ever speaks of a future dispensation, which is to be eternal. His kingdom of heaven has already begun. His Church on earth is but the beginning of that which is to be in heaven. This is only a preparation for the other : if the Gospel has within it a " peace which passeth understanding," it is only because it is the forerunner of that state which is beyond the heart of man to understand : if CHRIST here on earth says, that they who learn of HIM shall " find rest," it is by anticipation of that " rest which remaineth for the people of God."

The mind of man is such that it can find rest only in GOD, Who is infinite : it cannot therefore be satisfied with any finite and limited good—not even with the highest gifts which GOD bestows here below in the way of heavenly privileges ; but it still looks forward to something beyond : and when that is given, still again to something beyond, to something better than all that is given. And, knowing this, our heavenly FATHER gradually opens to us the great dispensations of His eternal providence. By what HE gives, always preparing us for something far better which HE has to bestow.

The Christian dispensation therefore is in Scripture constantly called the kingdom of heaven ; and spoken of under the same expressions as heaven itself. Woe be to us if we do not in time begin to live up to them. We are called upon to live the lives of Saints and Angels here on earth, in order that we may live with them hereafter ; we pray not only that that future " kingdom may come," but also that God's will may be already done " on earth, as it is in heaven."

Our state is great and awful in the extreme, much more so than we are willing to see or allow ; we, as Christians, are always

spoken of in Scripture, as being dead to this world, anticipating and being beforehand with natural death ; and being already in heavenly desires and mode of life risen with CHRIST. It has been well observed <sup>1</sup>, that as the state to which we are raised is like that of angels ; so, if we fall from this high estate, our fall will be like that of angels—irrecoverable and eternal !

<sup>1</sup> The Christian Year. Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

# S E R M O N LXIV.

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## THE EYE AND EAR OF GOD.

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PSALM xciv. 9.

“HE that planted the ear, shall HE not hear? HE that formed the eye, shall HE not see?”

A GOOD man would wish to be continually raising his mind to the thoughts of GOD, to the contemplation of His infinite perfections. We cannot indeed now conceive what HE must be, for we are so impure and sinful that HE hides HIMSELF from us: but a day will come when we shall all see HIM as HE is. And even here, in this our ignorance, HE has not left Himself without witness, for indeed all things speak of HIM. And we are frequently told in Holy Scripture, that from the signs of GOD, which we see in the visible objects among which we dwell, we should be led to think of HIM, and especially of His dealings with regard to ourselves.

Such is the case in this Psalm where the text occurs; it is said of the ungodly, “they say, Tush, the LORD shall not see,” to which the Psalmist answers, “Take heed, ye unwise among the people.—HE that planted the ear, shall HE not hear? HE that made the eye, shall HE not see?” How GOD hears and how HE sees we know not; but when HE has given His creatures such powers, eyes to see and know each other, and to mark each other’s ways, and ears by which they are made to understand the thoughts, and to know the hearts of other men: what must be His power to understand us, and to know us thoroughly, and to



watch and mark all our ways and doings? **HE** has given us judgment by which we are able to decide in some degree on each other's characters, to know the dispositions and temper of other men, and their feelings towards ourselves: and **HE** has given us memory by which we can recollect for a long time what others have done or said. But how infinitely above all our ideas of human judgment and human memory must be those mysterious attributes in **ALMIGHTY GOD**, by which **HE** knows and remembers all we say and do! All the knowledge of the wisest of men must be but like a little lamp to one that walks in the dark; but that of the **ALMIGHTY GOD** compared to it must be far greater than that of the sun at midday. All this reason itself would tell us, if men would only listen and attend to it. "O **LORD**, how glorious are Thy works!" says the Psalmist at the contemplation of it, "Thy thoughts are very deep: an unwise man doth not well consider this, and a fool doth not understand it." And in the Psalm from which the text is taken, it seems implied that nothing but the chastenings of **GOD** will so sober the mind of man, as to bring him to consider this at all aright, the weakness of his own imagination, by which he supposes that **GOD** does not regard his works, and will not punish him. "**HE** that teacheth man knowledge, shall **HE** not punish? The **LORD** knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are but vain. Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O **LORD**; and teachest him in Thy law."

To a thoughtful mind which is thus schooled by the chastening of **GOD**, there is nothing whatever around us but will speak of **GOD**, mysteriously and awfully, and yet in such ways as to afford us not only the highest wisdom, but also the most substantial comfort and encouragement. If we look at and examine the smallest insect, we find it so wonderfully fashioned, as to bear the most distinct marks of an Almighty hand: if we consider its ways and the mode in which it lives, and those wonderful arts and contrivances which are natural to it, as the curiously made web is to the spider, we cannot doubt but that the same Almighty power is ever with it, to support and sustain its being. And when we see **GOD** present in such little things as these, how can we doubt His Presence with ourselves also, in all matters that concern our spiritual life?

And we have the very highest authority for thus accustoming ourselves to raise our thoughts from these little things in nature to GOD's particular care and providence over ourselves. Our blessed LORD has Himself emphatically taught us to do so, "Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin." "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall HE not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"—"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink."—"Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your HEAVENLY FATHER feedeth them: are ye not much better than they?"

We know from the same Divine authority that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of our HEAVENLY FATHER: that "the hairs of our head are all numbered." If we look at the meanest flower that grows, we are startled almost, and half alarmed at the indications of an Almighty Presence. Thus, if according to our LORD's command, we look to nature; nature itself would teach us, that the humblest concern that can trouble us—the least event of our lives—is the object of His fatherly concern and care. And surely, indeed, the most thoughtless cannot but acknowledge this in some things, if not in others, even though in acknowledging it they perceive it not; for who is there that does not make a practice of thanking GOD, even though it be for form and custom's sake, and from no higher and better consideration,—yet who is there who does not as a matter of course thank GOD for His daily bread? And why should we thank HIM for it, but that therein we behold His Hand, as it were, visibly put forth from the cloud and providing for us?

Again, to apply the same analogy to the present subject, we know what the eye and ear of man is, what it is to have the eye or ear of a friend near to us, or the eye and the ear of a master watching over us; what a difference does it make at once in all our thoughts and feelings! Especially, suppose it is a friend or a master whom we love and reverence very much, what a vast difference does His presence make! We are hardly the same persons with him, as when he is away, in all the turn of our thoughts. It is only for

want of due attention and consideration that we do not thus think of ALMIGHTY GOD at all times. For as the Psalmist asks, "HE that made the ear, shall HE not hear? HE that made the eye, shall HE not see?"

And these words we may apply to all other faculties and affections HE has given us. Shall parents love their children, and feel a lively and tender interest respecting all their concerns? and who is it has put it into their hearts to do so? HE that made a parent's love, shall HE not love His own children? The Psalmist himself shall answer, "Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the LORD merciful unto them that fear HIM." HE has made parental love the very type and shadow of His own, but our LORD assures us it is a very inadequate and feeble one: for HE says, "If ye being evil," i. e. unkind when compared with GOD, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your HEAVENLY FATHER give good things to them that ask HIM?"

Has GOD put it into the hearts of us all to admire and love goodness, and kindness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, and shall we not find these most assuredly in HIM infinitely more than in the best of men? GOD Himself hath given us the answer, "Let the wicked forsake his way and turn unto the LORD, and HE will abundantly pardon him. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Has GOD made it His law, that as any one becomes more holy or just, he reveres more and more holiness and justice in others? and why is this, but that HE Himself is infinitely holy and just, and would have all our reverence and regard?

In all things indeed after all HE is as it were afar off, though indeed HE be very near to us: we feel after HIM in vain and cannot find HIM. HE passes by, and we perceive HIM not: His eye is upon us, but we are not conscious of it: His ear is listening to every word we say, while we think that nobody hears but frail and sinful creatures like ourselves. Let us therefore pray unto GOD to give us "the hearing ear and the seeing eye;" for these both, it is said, are from the LORD; that is to say, that

ear and that eye which is given unto the good Christian alone; the ear that can in all things hear GOD's voice, and the eye that can see HIM. Let us endeavour more to consider HIM as HE really is, and with reverence of heart to practise in ourselves the exercise and consideration of His Presence. It is only by long habit, and by living very carefully, and especially by fervent and devout prayer that we shall come to this knowledge, for it is "the pure in heart" alone who are privileged to "see GOD."

And now let us notice some few points, in which a reflection of that great truth which is contained in these words may be of great use to us, "HE that made the ear, shall HE not hear? HE that made the eye, shall HE not see?" The expressions of hearing and seeing, of the ear and of the eye, are but poor terms indeed to apply to the ALMIGHTY GOD, "who is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways;" and, "there is not a word on our tongue, but Thou, O GOD, knowest it altogether." These are, I say, but feeble words and unworthy ideas to apply to the Great God; but they are the only way in which we can raise our poor conceptions to HIM. And if we would consider aright even these, we should be far wiser and better than we are.

First of all with regard to the many confusions that abound in the world; the manifold disorders of the times which affect so seriously both the Church and nation, and perhaps every closer circle of life in which each of us is placed. Of this nation as of Israel of old, we can scarce doubt but the prophet of GOD would say, "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it." And from His Church GOD has seemed so far to withdraw His face, that to be supposed an enemy to His Church is the readiest way to obtain high trust and authority within her sanctuary: and in every department of life selfishness so abounds that the good man "maketh himself a prey." This state of things becomes a great trial to the humble-minded Catholic Christian, a continual temptation to impatient and unquiet, not to say, to uncharitable thoughts. Now to these there is no remedy equal to this: to consider that the Master of the House is Himself among us, and to reflect on the depth of meaning contained in the Psalmist's words, "HE that planted the ear, shall HE not hear? HE that formed the eye, shall HE not see?"

If we were to witness the case of a person wronged and injured

behind his back ; when they of his household take advantage of his absence, or his want of power ; we are apt to feel indignant as for one who cannot help himself. But when we know that HE is present, that HE regards it all most strictly ; when we reflect on that ever-present Eye and Ear that sleepeth not, and that Hand which no one escapeth, then is every rude and unseemly thought lost in reverential silence. What a reason for deep quietness of soul, for awful stillness and listening regard, at the consciousness of HIM who is in the midst of us though we see HIM not ! How is our anger mixed with tender compassion ; our grief at the conduct of others, tempered by a wholesome fear for ourselves ! Then we are unable to observe so narrowly the executors of God's judgments, from a nearer object that obstructs our view—those sins in ourselves which are the occasion of those judgments. Then, instead of the failings of those around us, we see the faults of our past life, which are visited on that little society in which we live, which bind our hands so that we cannot do them good, and make our prayers for them dull and heavy. Then we remember and seem for the first time to understand the awful meaning of GOD'S Word : "The LORD is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before HIM : " and in His secret chamber let each " commune with his own heart and be still."

Thus an habitual and due consideration of the Eye and Ear of God will keep us in a Christian temper of mind, in circumstances the most trying, teaching us to have thoughts and feelings as in a King's presence, in the presence of GOD.

In the second place, this awful doctrine of God's omnipresent Ear and Eye may greatly assist us in this work of self-amendment. How many things are there which men do which they would feel heartily ashamed and grieved at, if they were in the presence of a very good man, whose eye was upon them ! And were we to live always in the presence of a holy person, it is probable that this would lead us greatly to amend our whole conduct. What must it be, therefore, habitually to consider the Eye of God, in whose sight the Heavens are not clean, and Who chargeth His Angels with folly ? It is the thought of this which makes the saints of God always remarkable for profound humility : whatever else there may be in common in good men, there never yet was

a man accepted of GOD, but that acceptance was in proportion to his humility. The more they sounded the depths of His greatness, the more did they feel their own nothingness before HIM; and the only reason why men are proud is, because they forget the Eye of GOD, and, therefore, do not look upon themselves as in His sight. Nor shall we ever be able to learn this by our mere reason—for as far as that goes every body knows it; for who doubts but that HE who made the eye must be able to see what we are doing in some very awful and wonderful way, which we cannot think of? and yet this knowledge makes no difference whatever in men's hearts and lives, unless they habitually consider it in their practice, and act as if the Eye of GOD was upon them.

Or, again, does any one doubt but that the Ear of GOD hears most distinctly every word we utter, whether it be in the way of conversation with each other, or in prayer to HIM? And yet, however well men know this, they speak and pray too often as if this was not the case; indeed, this is the way with us all, excepting so far as GOD bestows, that greatest of all His gifts, a heart to feel this, faith to understand it, and grace to speak and pray as in His life-giving presence.

This incomprehensible Eye and Ear of GOD, in every place, beholding the evil and the good, which is now so mysterious that we must believe it though we cannot explain it, will lead us to understand something of what is said of the Day of Judgment. How it will be that for every idle word which men shall speak they shall give account thereof on the Day of Judgment, and that men shall receive a recompence for every thing which is done in the body, whether it be good or whether it be evil. For if to the eye and ear of GOD we add also the understanding, and knowledge, and the memory of GOD; or, rather, when we reflect what must be His perfections who has given these powers to man—then we shall perceive that, so far from these expressions in Holy Scripture, which speak of so strict an account, being difficult to understand, that Judgment will naturally follow in the most necessary and easy way, from these most certain attributes of GOD. At that last Day of account indeed it is said that the Master will have returned to take account of His servants as if HE had been absent and away; but the expression may be understood to mean that the Son of Man will then come to view—to

the sight of men, as a Master returning : but in Spirit and Power, as GOD, HE is still ever with them all the while, as much now as then, noticing and recording whatever they do.

But thirdly, there is another consideration to be derived from the thoughts of the Ear and Eye of GOD. As our ideas of GOD's knowledge and watchfulness are taken from the eyes and ears of men, so may we apply also to the same matter human affections also, which are often signified by these. Thus, it is said, that "the eyes of the LORD are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers." What is there in the world so encouraging, so consoling, so supporting, as the eye and the ear of a friend? It was in thus looking upon GOD as their sure and present Friend that the faith of the Patriarchs and of that noble army of martyrs, and prophets, and saints, mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, consisted : in that, as is there said of Moses, they endured "as seeing HIM who is invisible."

We are so formed by the ALMIGHTY that our happiness must consist in a great measure in human affections and sympathies ; there is nothing whatever in our life so important as this, and many other things in the world men desire in order to procure for themselves the esteem of friends ; and the greatest calamity in the world is to lose friends and relatives, or their goodwill and esteem. And this love and affection, which men often bear to each other, is considered to be of more value and worth than any thing that wealth can purchase. It is at the same time the most natural, and also the most innocent of all the enjoyments which God has connected with our life, and therefore, that one which HE most of all approves : such is the eye and the ear of a friend. It makes a great difference in all our feelings ; it makes the same place, the same objects appear quite otherwise to what they did before : sometimes when a person is lonely and depressed, the presence of a friend will immediately make him forget all his troubles : a journey, which would otherwise be long and tedious, in the presence of a friend becomes pleasant and comfortable ; and many labours, in themselves not agreeable, are made so by the company of another.

But how very poor are these satisfactions and encouragements compared to the Eye and the Ear of GOD,—when by prayer and

seriousness of mind we consider the ALMIGHTY as ever present with us ! Here alone there can be no disappointment, no change, no removal by distance or by death : here alone we can love with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, and find at last we have not been wrong in doing so. Therefore it is that our blessed LORD has been pleased to liken Himself often to a friend, or to some relative who stands nearest and next to us—as a parent, as a brother,—and to something more near even than these, as when HE says HE will come and dwell with us. And to those who will give up worldly ties for His sake, HE has not only said that HE will reward them with everlasting life, and that they will receive manifold more in this present time, but that HE will be HIMSELF to them in the place of these nearest relatives. Thus did HE point to His disciples and say that whosoever shall do the will of His FATHER, was to HIM as brother, and sister, and mother : and at another time did HE say that he who gave up these things—these relatives and friends—should receive the very same in this life also, shall receive now in this time an hundred fold, “brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children.” How could he receive these but in the Eye and Ear of JESUS CHRIST, which will be thus bent upon him with more true encouragement, more affectionate support, than these things could ever bestow ?

Let us endeavour thus to attain an abiding sense of God’s presence. And indeed the Incarnation of JESUS CHRIST is a wonderful assistance to us in so doing ; it is our blessed privilege to read and hear of HIM : it is ours to see HIM as it were, and to watch His gracious countenance, and to mark those expressions of love or pity, or awful indignation, which were noticed in His most holy demeanour. These things very much assist us towards realising His Divine Presence. It is ours to watch His gracious lips, when HE spoke so often, not in reply to words spoken, but to the thoughts of the heart. We may observe, to those who appeared most eager to follow HIM, HE turned to declare some timely warning : and those who did not dare to approach HIM, but desired to do so, HE ever drew near to HIM with most gracious but awful encouragement. These things will greatly assist us to reflect on His ever-present Eye and Ear, with earnest affection, but with deep fear.



# SERMON LXV.

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## THE STRAIT GATE.

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ST. MATTHEW vii. 13, 14.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

THERE are two things which holy Scripture sets before us in every possible way: the exceeding desire of the ALMIGHTY to save mankind; and the exceeding unwillingness of mankind to turn to HIM and to be saved, on the account of the extreme corruption of our hearts.

It has been well observed, how easy it is for GOD to create is evident from the first chapter of the book of GENESIS; for HE has only to speak the word, and all things are made. But how difficult it is even for ALMIGHTY power to redeem will appear from the sufferings of JESUS CHRIST,—from all the history of the world,—and from the fact that, after all that has been done, the way of life is narrow.

And this was very apparent when our LORD was manifest in the flesh, for HE went about with ALMIGHTY power, exceedingly desirous (if we may so venture to speak of HIM,) to restore and do good to all; to heal every disease, and remove every shape of evil; but still HE could not do, it is said, what HE wished to do, because of man's unbelief. This it was that grieved very keenly His gracious SPIRIT: from their unbelief and

hardness of heart, men would not allow HIM to do that which HE most earnestly desired : for this HE sighed and groaned deeply, and was troubled. How easy it was for HIM to work miracles on their bodies HE showed by healing the diseased by a word, and at a distance ; by calling the dead to life, even when a man had been in the grave four days. And how easy it was for HIM to make all nature to obey was very evident ; for the seas and the winds were listening for His voice. But as to getting men to repent and believe, this it would seem that ALMIGHTY power itself could not perform, for at last all our merciful LORD could do was—to weep over that sinful generation. HE gave them His own most holy example ; HE set before them very great promises, and very fearful warnings, and promised very sure assistance, and worked abundant miracles, to show them how much HE was willing and able to do for them ; but it was for the most part all in vain. HE shed tears over that unrepenting city, and soon after His blood ; but it was still in vain. Such unbelief is almost, one would think, impossible, and beyond the nature even of fallen man. Consider only the last and closing scene of His life, and all the circumstances attending it ; the Jews knew of our LORD's miracles, they were fully assured of them, they knew of His raising Lazarus from the grave. HE showed them the numerous prophecies concerning Himself. HE expostulated again and again with them ; and afterwards, when they were plotting together for His death, they endeavoured to obtain false witnesses against HIM, but they could find no fault in His spotless life. Pilate often and repeatedly intreated them to spare HIM, declaring HE was an innocent man : he used every effort to obtain His release, and in the presence of them all washed his hands of the innocent blood : Judas himself, the traitor, went to them, saying, that he had betrayed an innocent man, and cast down the money he had received in remorse and despair : Herod himself could find nothing in HIM worthy of condemnation. Again, at the time of His death for three hours at mid-day there was darkness over the whole land, and the sun withdrew its light ; there was an earthquake, and the graves were opened, and dead men arose. One of the thieves who hung with HIM on the cross repented and believed. The Roman soldier himself was struck with the miraculous manner in which our SAVIOUR died ; so that he cried out, “ Truly this was the

SON of GOD." The whole of nature, and perhaps other worlds besides our own, were moved in sympathy at the death and sufferings of their MAKER. The earth shook at hearing His dying voice, as if ready to give up her dead, as she will at His next voice: the sun hid his face; every thing was moved,—excepting the heart of the unbelieving Jews; they still continued blind, wilfully hardened, and unrepenting. It was easy for our blessed LORD to walk upon the waves of the sea; it was easy for HIM to feed thousands with a few loaves; but not so easy was it to get one child of Adam to repent and be forgiven. And therefore perhaps it is that (as HE has told us) there is joy among the Angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth; so great and difficult a matter is it to get one sinner to be converted, that it makes a movement, as it were, and a stir among the blessed societies of heaven.

And to say nothing of many other instances of this kind in holy Scripture, there is one other history, no less remarkable than this we have mentioned; the case of the Jews in the wilderness. They were surrounded with miracles and wonders, the sea opening to make a way for them, and standing as a wall on both sides; bread coming down daily from heaven to support them; the presence of GOD HIMSELF, seen in a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to lead them the way; water coming from the rock at the command of Moses; and GOD HIMSELF speaking to them and giving them commands. And yet where shall we find a stronger instance of God's long forbearance and loving-kindness; and of the hard heart of man? They sinned yet more and more, it is said; they murmured, they rebelled against God, and against Moses His servant, they fell into divers lusts, their heart kept continually turning back to Egypt; they despised God's promises, and would give no credence unto His Word.

Here again it might be seen how easy it was for God to cause the sea, and the earth, and the heavens to obey HIM; how all the elements were ready at His word to execute His commands; but how exceedingly difficult it was to get any man to believe and obey HIM. Out of all that vast number, for six hundred thousand left Egypt, only two would believe in HIM, and were fit to be admitted into the promised land. And yet all this care on the part of ALMIGHTY God was for the sake of mankind alone: and if they would have

followed HIM, and believed HIM, there were no bounds to the greatness of His promises to them; as HE said in that gracious remonstrance, "Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end; how should one of them chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight!" In like manner, as our LORD afterwards promised His disciples, that if they had but faith in HIM, nothing should be impossible to them, they should be able to remove mountains from their place. And it may be observed, that God's treatment of the Jews in the wilderness, His many expressions of kindness, His threats and warnings to disobedience, and promises to faith and repentance, may be very well compared with our LORD's treatment of the Jews, as recorded in the Gospels. The same earnest appeals to them, the same affectionate lamentations over them.

And certainly in both cases, the hardness of heart and wilful rejection of God were so extraordinary, that we should be inclined to think them incredible, and past belief, if the accounts were not written in the word of God itself. But if from these accounts of the generations of old, and God's dealings with them, we turn our attention to what we see around us in the present day; we shall see, I fear, the same thing now going on before our eyes; but which we have become so used to, are so familiar with, that we hardly notice it. Indeed, is it not to be feared that our own case may be even worse, if any thing, than that of those Jews to whom our SAVIOUR preached?

For the miracles which our SAVIOUR wrought among the Jews were not so generally known and believed among them, as they are now among ourselves. The mercies of CHRIST in redeeming mankind, the greatness of His power, the certain promises of His assistance and goodness, His dying and sufferings, and Who HE was who died and suffered; and above all, the presence of the Comforter, and the two Sacraments, by means of which these His great gifts are communicated to us: the unspeakable blessing of a Christian Church existing among us;—these things the Jews had not; or at all events not in the same degree that we have. And especially the sure and certain prospect of eternal life in happiness or in misery; and the knowledge that we are by death admitted into an unchangeable state;—these things were not generally known among the Jews, as they are among us.

And yet, can it be said that the lives of Christians are in any material respects better than those of the Jews in times of old? Is it not very much the same thing over again? unbounded mercies, and sure promises, and earnest entreaties, and dreadful warnings on the part of ALMIGHTY GOD; and on the part of man disobedience, unbelief, and forgetfulness of GOD. So much so, that, as St. Paul says, that the privileges and wonders of GOD shown to the Jews in the wilderness, were but types or emblems of what HE bestows on Christians; so, alas! is the conduct of the children of Israel too close and sad a copy of ourselves: we may close our eyes against it, we may refuse to hear it, but surely we cannot deny the truth of it. Is it not equally extraordinary and remarkable, how much our lives differ from what we know and profess? For instance, we all know, as soon as we know any thing, that any day of our lives we may find ourselves on the other side of the eternal veil, and our portion sealed for ever in a condition beyond all possibility of change; and as this may happen any day, we know that it must be the case in less than a hundred years. And we also know that our future condition will depend on the terms of the Gospel, on the manner in which we have kept or neglected the terms of the Gospel covenant; have fulfilled the requisites, to which alone the promises there are given;—on whether we have pursued the objects there set before us, the love of GOD and our neighbour, or set our hearts on inferior things. And yet must it not be said that people in general do live and die, as if nothing of this kind was set before them? Are there not many as covetous, as if they had never heard of the danger of riches, of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; as proud, as if they had never heard of CHRIST'S humility; as much taken up with this world, as if there was no other? Are men in general in any adequate way impressed with the great things which the Gospel sets before us, to awaken our hopes and our fears? Are they as constant in prayer, and in all those means which dispose the heart to prayer, as might with reason be expected? Are they as honest and charitable, as pure and sober-minded as those should be, who look to a Judgment to come? Is not the contrary manifestly the case all around us? Is it not the most difficult thing in all the world to get men to repent? and yet do they not know that they must perish for ever, if they do not repent? and do

they not know, that if they would repent, God would hasten to meet them with His blessing—would restore them; and for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, would admit them to the great glories and happiness of heaven? Do they not know that HE continues every day to give them blessings and comforts, for no other purpose but this—in order to lead them to repent? that HE continues to send them warnings every day, and encouragements? And yet, do they not become so hardened more and more in forgetfulness of God, that, after some time, to renew them to repentance seems as difficult almost as to turn a river back to its fountain? Surely all those things which appear to us so extraordinary, when we read of the people in the wilderness, and of those among whom our SAVIOUR preached and worked His miracles, are not in any way more wonderful than what we see around us. Alas! we cannot but believe that JESUS CHRIST is weeping over Christians now, as HE did then over the Jews; there is nothing whatever wanting but their own endeavours; but yet they will not endeavour. Heaven and hell are expecting; Judgment is every day nearer; death is on every side; they can if they would, by GOD'S grace, which HE never denies to those who seek it—they can if they would; but they will not repent. They will not even consider their condition; they will not even think of their danger; they are asleep on a precipice, with a bottomless pit beneath them, and are angry with any one who reminds them of their danger.

Is not this too true a picture of mankind—indeed of us all? if not in every respect, yet in many, true of us all, in all those points in which we are not acting up to those holy rules of living, which JESUS CHRIST has given?

If by any visitation of GOD we are set in the school of affliction, and taught therein, by His mercy, the things which belong unto our peace; yet how very soon do we forget these lessons? For a time we are amazed and alarmed at our exceeding folly, and frailty, and wickedness; but very soon after, our evil heart returns to those very objects which it had but a little while before so strongly condemned. So that that history, which appeared to us so strange, of St. Peter declaring so positively that he would lay down his life for his LORD, and a few hours afterwards denying that he knew HIM: or the Jews who received HIM with joyful

acclamations and hosannahs; and a few days after cried, "away with HIM, crucify HIM;"—these accounts, which appear so incredible when we read them, are by no means worse or more extraordinary than those changes which, when we look into our own lives, we find in ourselves. The forty years of the Israelites in the wilderness is but too true an account of the forty years of man's trial upon earth.

Can we not see from these things, that as eternal salvation is of all things the highest object on which our hearts can be set, so it is the most difficult? And indeed a great part of the difficulty consists in this, that we will not be persuaded it is so difficult in our own case, but think that on account of the unbounded mercies of GOD, we may ever secure our pardon, and can repent whenever we please. And therefore, when worldly things go well with us, we are full of self-confidence, we are full of care about every thing but our spiritual condition; and when we are afflicted, we are too much cast down: whereas in adversity we should learn Christian hope, and in prosperity we should fear always and exceedingly. In the case of others we see the difficulty, we see their danger, we see their folly; but the evil spirit is too busy, and too crafty in stifling our conscience, and keeping alive earthly hopes and fears, to allow us to feel it in our own.

If we were always sensible of our danger, then we should always depend more on GOD; and our danger would be far less in consequence. And surely, if we would only take our LORD at His word, when HE assures us that our danger is so great, we should always live under a sense of it, and therefore become the objects of His mercy.

But instead of this, we think we are doing very well, if we are no worse than the generality of Christians; whereas our lives being like those of other people, is a sure proof that we are not in the way of safety; for broad is the way that leadeth unto destruction. And yet we are apt to judge of ourselves, to regulate our conduct, to do things, or to leave them undone, not according to what GOD's word requires, but by looking to what other people think necessary.

And yet it is very awful, and enough to make the hardest heart serious, to consider, that if there are many who go the way of destruction, and few there be that find the gate of life, then each

should reflect, that the chances are, that he himself will not find it. He is more likely to be of the number of the many, than of the few. If each person would seriously consider this, such a thought would make him very earnest about his salvation. We should not dare, if we thought of this, to set at nought God's forbearance and mercy in the way that we do. Surely, if a man knew no more of holy Scripture than the words of this awful text, it were enough to make his life very different from what our lives generally are; it were enough to lead him to give himself up wholly and entirely to amend his own conduct, in God's sight, and to the diligent study of His holy word.

As it is, since it is so very difficult to induce men seriously to attend to religion and to repent before it becomes too late, we must not of course expect to do much by sermons or other means, without very earnest endeavours to obtain God's grace. The best thing we can do, is to pray for ourselves and others, that we and they may be brought to a true sense of our sinfulness, while the time of trial still lasts; that God will of His mercy give us contrite hearts.

And next to this, and with this, all that can be done is to keep pressing on our own minds, and those of others (with the hope that out of so many, some one may not hear in vain); to urge, I say, continually such advice as this; that instantly, and without delay, we set ourselves to the great work of amendment. That first of all, we consider, how far in our past lives we have dealt honestly and justly with all mankind; and where we have not done so, to make at once what restitution is in our power. To consider whether we are not able to set aside, yearly, monthly, or weekly, more for the Church of God and for the poor than we have done. It is desirable, for many reasons, that we should have some regular plan of this kind; and it were also much to be wished that this were done at the holy Communion. Alms at such a time were doubly acceptable with God: and it hardly seems right to give only a little for form's sake, on such an occasion of our most solemn worship.

But especially we should at once determine to improve our daily prayers, to pray more *seriously*, more frequently and constantly than we have ever yet done; not occasionally, but to make a regular habit of doing so; and to pray especially that God will not



give us over to a false peace and a silent conscience ; that HE will open our eyes that we sleep not in death.

For what an awful thing it is to reflect that there should be any one here present, who should not find the gate of life ; that any one of us, who meet here together of a Sunday, should, when he dies (that is to say, in the course of a few years), find the door of heaven for ever shut against him ! That this should be the case with any one in the place where we live, with any one whom we know and see ; what a moving, what a concerning thought is this ! And yet, if this thought is so sad and awful, what is it to reflect, that the way of destruction is broad, and many there be who go in thereat, and that few find the gate of life ! And therefore, among any considerable number of persons, such as meet together in any one place, it is probable that the many are in the way of destruction, and few in the way of heaven. Who they are, who are right and who are wrong, does not concern us, for that great Day only will reveal it : we must judge nothing before the time ; but this reflection does concern us very deeply with respect to ourselves. For each one should consider for himself alone, that it is not very improbable that he may himself fail of his great prize ; that without great pains he certainly will do so ; that he must lower and humble himself very much, if he would enter in at the narrow gate.

# SERMON LXVI.

## THE DOOR CLOSED.

ST. LUKE xiii. 25.

“When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door.”

It is impossible to conceive any thing more awful, than those many expressions in Holy Scripture which speak of the door being closed, and the like.

The thought of the door shut, and no hope of its ever being again opened, and the warning given us, to take heed lest we be found without, should lead us to consider habitually the great value of each day which is given us before that time.

The words of our blessed LORD we may be quite sure set before our minds the closest resemblance, the most perfect description, which our thoughts are capable of forming, of the circumstance of those who will find themselves set without when they die:—of those who have lost for ever their great prize. “When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door!”

The same expression is used in the parable of the foolish virgins: “The Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with HIM, and the door was shut;”—then came the other virgins, saying, “LORD, LORD, open to us.” Our SAVIOUR here seems to liken their condition to those who come too late to a

feast, and find they are shut out: when it is all light and rejoicing within, and without nothing but darkness and misery, no place to turn to, no one to flee unto. But what is implied in all these places is, that there is no chance of the door being ever again opened, and therefore their condition is described with the most dreadful symptoms of human anguish, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out."

Many other are the ways in which the same thing is described, which is here spoken of as the door being closed; it is like the flood which came "when they knew not," *i. e.* considered not, "and took them all away:" or, "where the tree falleth there it must lie;" which words tell us that at the death of each this irreparable condition has come. And, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave whither thou goest." It is described to us as being like the condition of Esau, when he lifted up the exceeding bitter cry, finding that he had thrown away his birthright; for "he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." And our blessed LORD has put it before us in a still more striking way, by giving us the account of the condition of a man who has found himself thus placed, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "Between us and you," said Abraham unto him, "there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." Every thing that has happened both in this and in the other world was equally known to our SAVIOUR, and, therefore, in this parable HE may have been describing a circumstance that has really happened in the other world; but at all events we may be sure that it furnishes us with the most accurate and exact picture, which can be formed, of that condition.

In other places our mortal condition is likened to a day in which our appointed work must be done, or not at all: our blessed LORD, out of warning to us, is pleased to speak thus of His own appointed course upon earth: "I must work the work of

HIM that sent me while it is day : the night cometh, when no man can work."

The fast approach of such a time as this must make us all see the necessity of our being safe and right, in all matters that can never then be corrected or amended : what that time finds undone, must continue undone for ever : no availing prayer can be offered, no work can be done which can be put into the scale of our everlasting condition.

And if our LORD has expressed to us in these very awful words, the exceeding importance of that moment which is overtaking us all, one after another ; when the door is closed and the unworthy are shut out : HE has made use of another expression not very unlike it, to describe the exceeding happiness of our present condition as compared with it, " Knock and it shall be opened unto you ;" and " every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." And that we may not be disheartened by any fear of failure, if our requests do not appear to be immediately answered, HE has given us a very encouraging and consoling parable to urge us not to give over our importunity : " Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves ; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him ? and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not : the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed : I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." And to which parable our LORD has added, " If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly FATHER give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask HIM !"

From which, and like expressions, we may see that the more serious sense we have of that awful condition, where there is no place for repentance, the more shall we feel the great value and privilege, the extreme blessing of our present state. Surely nothing can show more strongly the worth of every day and every hour that is given us ; every day and every hour we can ask, and we never can ask seriously without receiving ; and what would they

give for one day and for one hour, who are now shut without the gate, without any hope of its being again opened?

But why are we so slow to value them? why do we so little consider their importance, that of each day that passes over our heads, and bears us on to that great, interminable, unchangeable sea?

This our extreme unwillingness, and the exceeding desire of our heavenly FATHER that we should turn to HIM, our blessed LORD is pleased to set before us by another form of the same expression. HE has graciously condescended to describe HIMSELF as the person who is knocking and seeking for entrance, and ourselves as they who have power to let HIM in, as if all the opportunity, all the desire were on His part; and on our part the reluctance to admit HIM in this our day. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with ME."

And we may well suppose, that a great part of our LORD'S affliction upon earth, was to know and witness among mankind this indifference; to look round upon the world, and to see so many thousands with no care or concern whatever to knock, while the door will be assuredly opened to their knocking; and to see also so many thousands in the other world, unseen by us in the flesh, who would give worlds to have the power of being admitted once more to the possibility of pardon, but having no hope; for to them "the MASTER hath risen up and shut-to the door, and they begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, LORD, LORD, open to us." And to see so many upon earth passing from one of these states into the other so very fast, of all ages of life—as soon as they are born, hastening to an end. This consideration gives a peculiar force to all our LORD'S words, as HE spoke as one who had both worlds equally in His eye, and who knew every thing that was going on in the other as well as in this. And we may suppose that this knowledge, even the holy Angels have, who are about His throne, and that this is the reason why they feel so intense an interest about us, as to "rejoice over one sinner that repenteth."

And from his having this knowledge of the two worlds, there is another consideration also, which must have been ever present to

our LORD'S mind, in a way that it cannot be to ours, *viz.* of the exceeding shortness of our mortal stay here on earth: for how extremely short must it appear to HIM who could see through eternity? For even to ourselves, ever as we grow older, time appears to get shorter and shorter, every year appears to pass quicker than the preceding, as our mind grows; whereas in childhood a year appeared very long, it is much shorter in manhood. And another reason why we do not perceive the difference between time and eternity is, because the minds of most of us are engrossed by passing interests and concerns: were the world quite shut out from our thoughts, the case would appear to us very different. The more we disengage ourselves from it, the more we pray and study the Scripture, the more do we come to understand the reality of our condition; the more do we come to judge of things according to the mind which was in JESUS CHRIST; and therefore to see more fully the meaning of His gracious and awful words.

What a tender consideration for others, what an earnest anxiety for ourselves, should this thought produce in our minds! Even the rich man, when he came to know the reality of these great truths in the place of torment, was touched with a feeling of pity for those who were upon earth, throwing away their lives in the midst of such delusions. It was the first thought, next to that of his own sufferings, that moved his mind, in his for ever hopeless condition: "Then he said, I pray thee, father, that thou wouldest send Lazarus to my father's house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." And this should teach us not to deceive ourselves with the thought, that we have occasionally some good feelings of pity, for such we find that even this wretched man had in the place of lost spirits. But when we are brought to a true sense of things, let us not waste our feelings in a mere idle pity for others, but let us, while we have time, endeavour without delay to do them real good; by this only can we approach to the mind which was in CHRIST.

Our not having done so, not having actively and perseveringly done good to our Christian brethren is, our LORD has told us, the very thing which HE will bring forward at last, as the reason why HE will not admit those who will have at that time to

knock in vain, He will say, "Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have not done it unto Me." And the reason why this will be their condemnation may be this, that it is in God's sight the proof that they have never earnestly and sincerely received the Gospel, and the terms of pardon contained in it, at all; for when a person does so, then the immediate and necessary consequence is, that together with an earnest fear respecting himself is a tender concern for others, first of all for those who are nearest to them, and then for all others. The first act of repentance will be ever as it was of old, "Zaccheus stood and said unto the LORD, Behold, LORD, the half of my goods I give unto the poor; and if I have done any wrong to any man, I restore him fourfold." Indeed, a serious sense of our condition cannot but inspire us with this tender pity for all mankind: when any one ventures to say to himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," then such a thought immediately fills the heart with selfishness, and selfish projects. But when the words of God Himself to this foolish man sound in our ears, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee:" or, "be ye also ready, for at such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh;" then, indeed, instead of selfishness and a hard heart, we become softened and subdued.

The thought that on so many who are busily engaged in the perishable concerns of the day, the door of life will so soon have closed, this is indeed a moving thought! But to think that many are so perfectly unconcerned at what happens beyond it, at the thought that they may find the door of heaven for ever closed against them, how much more moving is this thought to the Christian! What else is there in the world worthy of any serious regard, much less of any care and anxiety, than that we may be found safe at that awful hour; that nothing may be left undone which we shall then wish to have done? Surely, we should feel heartily ashamed of allowing any thing else to trouble us but this one thing: every thing else we should cast aside as needless impertinences, as things which do not concern us, as matters of no real importance. We should practise ourselves to keep a constant and steady eye set on this one thing, allowing nothing whatever to divert us from this one purpose, weighing all things with respect to this one thing alone, taking care every

day to do something to advance us forward on our road. As we read of **JESUS CHRIST**, that **HE** "set His face stedfastly to go to Jerusalem;" so should we set our faces stedfastly to the heavenly Jerusalem, hoping for nothing, caring for nothing, fearing nothing, excepting only with regard to this one thing which alone is needful. If we would once do this, then we should begin to feel what it is to offend and displease **HIM** who is alone worthy to be feared: what it is to have forfeited His favour who alone is worthy of all our love: then we shall learn rightly to estimate the time we have wasted, and the time that we have worse than wasted: then we shall begin to consider how little time we have left, even at the longest, for so great a work. Then we shall perceive the greatness of our temptations, our exceeding weakness in the day of trial, and the reality of our danger: then we shall begin to see the magnitude of that prize for which we are contending; how terrible and how irrecoverable the miscarriage if we fail: how fearful the thought to find ourselves on a sudden thrust without! the door closed against us, and no place to turn unto, but that bottomless pit from which there is no escape!

Let these terrible realities lead us betimes to take to heart the things that belong unto our peace, lest they should be for ever closed from our eyes: let us not dare to look back to the world while engaged in so great a work, lest that look cost us our immortal souls, remembering Who it is that has told us to think of Lot's wife. Let us ever be mindful that we have enemies around us, very crafty, and very powerful, who know our weak points far better probably than we do ourselves, and who will never give over lying in wait for us till we are in our graves; never for one day can we be safe if left to ourselves. What words, therefore, can be more suitable for us, than the solemn prayer of our Church; "of whom may we seek for succour but of Thee, O **LORD**, who for our sins art justly displeased? Yet, O **LORD GOD** most holy, O **LORD** most mighty, O holy and most merciful **SAVIOUR**, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death."



## SERMON LXVII.

CONSCIENCE, AN EARNEST OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

*PREACHED ON ADVENT SUNDAY.*

I ST. JOHN iii. 20.

“If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

THESE words refer to the great duty, the universal, indispensable duty, of self-examination; and therefore they are well suited for our consideration, at this time of Advent in particular.

For as the evening is the natural time for examining one's self concerning the past day, and forming good resolutions for the next, so is Advent, concerning the past and the next year. The great Day of Judgment, the second coming of our LORD, begins now to be set before us, with all its terrible circumstances, foretold by HIMSELF; in order that we, truly judging and trying ourselves, may the more worthily keep our Christmas, the memory of His first coming; and not throw away that His unspeakable favour.

And this so much the more, as the world grows older, and we draw nearer our own latter end. According to the warning which you heard in the Epistle to-day; “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as in the day.”

In this place the Church urges us to consider Advent as our

morning twilight, as our preparation for the coming year. But as no one can rise up and go about his day's work properly, without having well considered his own former failures and weak points, so we shall do rightly to regard Advent as our evening twilight also; using it as a time to pause and look back upon the past year, and asking ourselves such questions as these :—"What have I done? how have I employed myself? what growth have I made in good habits? where, in short, am I now, compared with where I was this time last year? Am I nearer GOD, or further from HIM? Were I to be taken at this moment, would my condition be better or worse?"

These are the sort of questions we should ask; not with any expectation of being able certainly to find out the right answer, but with the certainty of finding enough to alarm us, at least, and put us on our guard; and with the wholesome resolution to keep such our awful thoughts continually before us, and live more wakefully, if so it may be, in the year now beginning, than we have in the past year.

Every body, even the most worldly person, sees at once the advantage of thus looking into things, and examining one's self from time to time. Every one knows the absolute necessity of casting up accounts in trade or business, of reviewing at set periods the condition of one's farm, or shop, or household; of stopping mischiefs in the beginning, before they get too bad to be mended. Every one feels how good it must be for him to "stand in awe," to put his heart and conscience from time to time more immediately before his God, who, he knows, is always watching it; "to commune with his own heart and in his chamber, and be still." Such exercises keep a man's conscience tender, they give him a better chance of remembering and repenting of sins past; of preparing and bracing himself against future temptation. If you want, for example, to break yourself of anger and passion, common sense teaches you that one most likely way is, to consider every night how far you have transgressed in that way, and every morning what is likely to provoke you; that so you may prepare your heart for the danger to come, and humble your soul for the transgressions that are gone by; and both, in the fear of God.

All these are what may be called the *natural* advantages of

regular self-examination; and it has been recommended, and (no doubt) practised, for the sake of such advantages as these, by wise and good men who as yet knew nothing of CHRIST. But now we who believe the Creed, and know that CHRIST will come to judge us, we have learned to consider this exercise in a far more awful and mysterious way. To a Christian man, duly considering what CHRIST's Gospel teaches of the things out of sight, and of the way in which it has pleased the ALMIGHTY to connect them with the things in sight—to such an one, solemn self-examination, at certain times, is far more than a prudent precaution, invented or adopted by himself, to keep his passions in order. To him it is a holy exercise, ordained by ALMIGHTY GOD, to be, as it were, a rehearsal of the day of judgment.

As our nightly sleep is an image of death, so the nightly self-examination of a thoughtful person is in some sort an image of the last great day.

As the Holy Communion is the earnest and pledge of Heaven, so the trial and judgment of our ownelves, which we are ordered to practise before the Holy Communion, is a shadow of that awful hour, when we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of CHRIST. As St. John the Baptist came, with his severe calls to repentance, before our LORD; so before Christmas comes Advent—the remembrance of judgment, the warning call, “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet HIM.”

In a word, whenever GOD visits in graciousness, it will be well for those, who have prepared themselves to receive HIM, by deeply fixing their hearts on the thought of HIM, as now and always present within us, to be our JUDGE; and examining themselves accordingly, as in that fearful Presence.

I say, “now and always present within us:” for is it not so, that what we call Conscience—that inward sense of right and wrong, which every man feels more or less within him, now accusing, now excusing, now whispering peace, and now remorse and self-reproach—is it not true that this is the voice of GOD? Is it not as the faint low murmurs, which are sometimes heard in the air before a thunder-storm? and are we not sure, that what they tell us, of the sentence to be passed on our misdoings, will be repeated in such tones as shall shake heaven and earth, when the great day shall come?

A parent, for example, neglects or ill-uses his child: if he ever feel shame and confusion at thinking of it now—and surely all who sin against their own children must be more or less uneasy, however present temptation may drown their remorse—he may depend on it, that the shame and confusion which he feels, is hardly to be accounted a faint shadow of what must come upon him, except he repent, when that child and he shall stand together before the all-seeing Eye, and behold It fixed on them.

Or, to take a more common case: a child has been undutiful to a parent, and trembles at the thought of what his parent may next say to him. How will it be with that son or daughter, when he rises from the dead, and feels that he is presently to meet that parent again, except he quickly and earnestly repent?

And so in all other cases: the remorse, the misgivings, the scruples, the gnawing anguish, which men feel, while they are planning any sin, or after they have committed it, are so many hints and tokens from HIM, what it must all come to at last, without a great and serious change. “The spirit of man,” says Solomon, “is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inmost parts.” That is, if we will listen to the silent warnings of our conscience, which seem to be our own, but in fact come from HIM, we shall by degrees improve in the knowledge of ourselves: our secret sins, our deep and hidden dangers, the mystery of our own iniquity, will become known to us: happy, if we profit by the knowledge, and resort in good time to that better SPIRIT, who only can undo the mischief, wherein we have entangled ourselves.

And this is the meaning of that other wise man, who says—“Let the counsel of thine own heart stand, for there is no man more faithful unto thee than it.” As if he had said, When your conscience fairly tells you you are wrong, I beseech you, let the impression remain; do not attempt to soothe or trifle it away: they are but false friends, that would help you to do so. To listen to them instead of your conscience, is listening to man instead of God. If your heart and conscience condemn you, God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things: they know next to nothing; they have no power to acquit or condemn. In such a case, therefore, be greatly afraid to take comfort from any one, against the plain reproof of your conscience.

This rule holds, even in respect of that judgment which every

man, Christian or heathen, passes by instinct on himself: how much more in the case of Christians, when we recollect what further inward light they have abiding within *them*, what a Judge is come down from Heaven, to preside in the court of *their* conscience? That awful Judge, that heart-searching Light, is the MOST HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, given to every one of us in Baptism. So we are plainly taught by St. John, in the chapter next before the text—"Ye have an unction, an anointing, from the HOLY ONE: and ye know all things. The Anointing which ye have received of HIM abideth in you, and ye need not that any man should teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in HIM." The anointing was the gift of the HOLY GHOST, coming on all Christians in Baptism, as it came on our LORD when He was baptized by St. John. If it teaches us of Christian doctrine, confirming us in the Holy Creed, which we have been taught; surely it teaches us of Christian practice too, confirming us in the Holy Commandments, which we have sworn to obey.

Here then is another reason, an unspeakable reason, why Christian persons should attend very much to the warnings of their own conscience. They may be, they very often most surely are, the warnings of the MOST HOLY COMFORTER: of HIM whom CHRIST has sent to dwell in our hearts, to guide us into all truth.

You think it strange, that the children of Israel, plainly directed as they were by the cloud in sight over the tabernacle door, which way to move, what to do, whom to serve,—that they should ever have broken God's ordinances, and moved backward instead of forward. Why, it is the very thing you do yourself, as often as the voice within bids you forbear, and you go wilfully on; as often as it bids you abstain, and you indulge. The perverse Jews had not more reason to know that GOD was guiding them in the cloud, than we Christians have to acknowledge HIM present, and speaking in our hearts by His SPIRIT.

Depend on it, it is no slight or mean gift, that Uncction from the HOLY ONE. Having it, the Apostle says, "we know all things." The expression is remarkable, and answers wonderfully to those words of St. Paul, "I can do all things through CHRIST, which strengtheneth me." To know all things, and

to do all things, are great privileges indeed, and such as we never durst have affirmed of any but the Most High God Himself: but He, you perceive, affirms them of all Christians: so making good His own declaration, so wonderful to think of, by another Apostle, That we are partakers of a divine nature.

Let us not then be afraid to trust our own heart, whenever it tells us plainly we are not in a good way: rather let us be very much afraid not to trust it, not to obey it; for it is a voice from a place where God has promised to be. To use again the words of the text: "If our heart" (our natural conscience) "condemn us, God," the HOLY GHOST dwelling in our heart, "is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things:" knoweth much that our own heart hath either forgotten or never knew, the many sad circumstances and shades of deeper guilt in our sin. The HOLY SPIRIT knows all this, and if our sin seem bad to ourselves, depend upon it, it is in His sight infinitely worse.

Thus, whether we regard ourselves as judged by our own conscience, or by the sacred in-dwelling SPIRIT, either way we come to this very serious conclusion; that whatever our own heart reproves us for, God is reproofing, and will reprove us, very much more. When we reject such warnings, we reject the HOLY GHOST; when we stifle and drown them, we quench the HOLY GHOST; when we endeavour to turn away from them, or only to dismiss them with slight notice, then we grieve the HOLY GHOST, and provoke HIM to diminish His grace.

Here, I say, is matter for serious thought indeed, could we bring the doctrine home to our hearts, as thoroughly as we believe it with our minds, and acknowledge it with our lips. I will try to set down its effect in a few cases: but, first, I will guard against a wrong use which may be made of it.

We know that there is such a thing as a mistaken conscience, an over tender conscience, imagining things wrong and inexcusable, which are not so at all; and it is possible that such an one hearing—"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things," may be led to pain and grieve himself all the more. Whereas these words, if he would consider them, may suggest a way of thought which may calm him and set him right. If your heart condemn you, that is, if you be inclined to vex yourself about something which you did at the

time for the best, but which has turned out ill, remember that GOD is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things; and perhaps this matter may be of less consequence in His eyes than it appears now to you; your great concern about it may be in part a snare of the Devil, to turn you away from present and pressing duties. You had better therefore commit it to GOD, with hearty penitence and prayer: leave it in His hand, and set about your day's work cheerfully.

This, if the case were really doubtful, and you did for the best: but it is another matter, when the case was plain, and your conscience spoke out, and you disregarded it; then, I fear, you come under the more alarming sense of the text; then God's greater knowledge of your ways and thoughts will only serve to confirm your own heart's condemnation. Your only way of safety and wisdom will be, most humbly to submit to this; to embrace and hold fast the thought, as part of that cross, which, however it burthen and gall you, is your only salvation.

Settle it in your hearts to believe, and carry the thought about with you every where, in your work and in your rest, that the serious misgiving of your own heart is the call of the HOLY GHOST within you, and therefore, whatever seems decidedly bad to you, must of course appear much more so to HIM. Endeavour to have this assurance quite familiar and ready in your mind, and use it to help you in putting away the many whispers of the Evil Spirit, whereby, if he could, he would encourage you to stifle all that your own heart, all that GOD's good SPIRIT, may say of the charge that lies against you.

For example, he is ready, not seldom, with this suggestion; that, to be sure, your own conduct, in such and such things, does appear contrary to rule, when it is thought over; but then, could we know all (so the Evil One argues), we should, probably, find many more just as bad, of whom we, and all men, have now a very good opinion. Well, and suppose it were so, the question is, not whether others are as bad or worse, but whether, if I do such things, I can possibly be good enough to please GOD. And this is no question, but a certain impossibility, in the eyes of those who really believe and recollect, that the voice of their conscience, pleading with them, is the Voice of the HOLY GHOST. Others may be impure in secret, and the same Voice may plead with

them also ; or it may not plead so distinctly as with you ; of that you know nothing : but this one thing you do know, that the Sacred Voice has pleaded, and is pleading, in your heart against impurity ; and now, if you sin, you sin deliberately, under the very eye of the Judge. You must take the consequences, and will have no reason to complain, should you find them infinitely worse than you now understand ; as much worse as might be expected from the difference between God's knowledge and yours, concerning the real amount and guilt of your sins.

But, it may be, the Tempter takes another tone with you, and tries to persuade you, that, after all, there is not so much in what we call conscience ; it is matter, he may say, of opinion, of feeling, of fancy : there is as much difference in consciences as in tastes ; and HE who made all, will make allowance for all. Any how, he will say, there must be great liberties allowed, where people's judgments differ so very widely.

Now here, again, the thought of God present within, and of conscience, His attendant, repeating His decisions in our hearts, seems well calculated to put such impiety to silence. Men's consciences do *not* differ so widely as the devil and his messengers would persuade us. Who is there, all over the earth, that does not own the duty of children to honour their parents ? who that does not feel, that for good, good should be returned ? Trust the Voice of God within, and believe, in spite of those bad suggestions, that others hear it, or have heard it as well as you. The proud Assyrian said, "There is no religion, no God, that can stand against me. Is not one place as another ? is not Calno as Carchemish ? is not Hamath as Arphad ? Is not Samaria as Damascus ?" But good Hezekiah believed his own heart, which told him there was a LORD GOD in Israel, who dwelt between the Cherubims, and to whom he might come in all his perplexities ; and the end showed which was right ; —the Assyrian was cut off, and Hezekiah was saved.

Again (and this, perhaps, is the most numerous class of all), there are those who are inclined to dismiss all serious thoughts and scruples, for a time at least, altogether from their minds ; as if they would come again in good time, whenever it shall please God ; and, in the mean while, they may take things easy.

Now, (not to speak here of the desperate madness, of taking for granted that it will please God to give them as much time as they



demand, and be found of them whenever they please to seek, although HE has distinctly said, "Some shall seek HIM early, and shall not find HIM:") consider, I beseech you, what you would think of one who should hear GOD'S voice actually calling to him from Heaven, and should answer, as St. Paul was answered by Felix; "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee?" Would it not be unutterable profaneness? And yet, if the voice of conscience be indeed the Voice of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT speaking within us, this is what we really do say, when we put away self-condemning thoughts.

And when the world, and worldly friends, say, "Do not be so over-serious; do not turn melancholy and gloomy before the time; there will be plenty of leisure by and by for meditating on such matters;" is not this in effect, advising one's friend to give that very answer to the ALMIGHTY Himself, which sounds so profane, when we read of it as given to an Apostle?

I beg of you to turn this over in your minds; for surely neglect of inward scruples and warnings is one of the commonest of all sins, and few, very few there are—are there any?—who know how heinous a sin it is. Few, very few, if any, are accustomed to believe, and recollect, and realize, the presence of GOD'S SPIRIT in a Christian's heart, so as really to distinguish His warning or condemning voice, in the low deep murmurings of their own conscience, when they are set on thinking of their own ways, past or to come.

For example, a young person is tempted to tell a lie, to obtain some present satisfaction, or get himself out of some present trouble. He does it with uncasiness for the first time; and the thought will come in and disturb him afterwards, "That all liars"—they are the words of the Most High GOD—"shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." It would be well for a person in such a state of mind, if some one were nigh to remind him, that these scruples, these troublesome thoughts, are not his own; there is a great and good SPIRIT present in him; HE puts them into his mind. Such a recollection might, perhaps, prevail on some to cherish these holy scruples, and really to obey them, confessing and bewailing their falsehood, in the hope that the pain and shame of doing so might be accepted by their Judge as a sort of holy revenge, which they take upon themselves for their great

sin; and not only confessing and bewailing it, but really turning from it for ever. When your conscience tells you that you have told a lie, be that lie more or less shocking in its circumstances, still the very thought is the whisper of the TEACHER within you: His warning never to do so again, but to speak the truth boldly, as you ought to speak, though it be to your own worldly hindrance; you who are a member of CHRIST, and, through HIM, of all Christians.

There will be whispers of a contrary kind, encouraging you to think lightly of the sin, nay, perhaps even to pride yourself on the skill, with which you have made the falsehood serve your own purpose for a time. But you will know from what sort of spirit those whisperings come, and will put them out of your mind accordingly.

Else, if you unhappily listen to them, and either please yourself with your deceit, and what you have gained by it, or, at least, forget to repent of it, then, the next time a tempting opportunity of the like kind arises (and it will not be long before the Devil contrives one), the HOLY SPIRIT, vexed by your former profaneness, will whisper to your heart less loudly; the prayers of your friends will avail less in your favour; your own prayers will savour more of hypocrisy and a double mind. If you fall again, the third time your chance will be still less; and so on, till a regular habit of falsehood is formed, and the HOLY SPIRIT, grieved more and more, quite ceases to warn and make you uneasy in your sin.

Wherefore, whether it be telling lies, or any other sin to which you are tempted, beware of overcoming or slighting the *first* scruple; beware how you turn away your ear from the voice, however still and small, which comes over your heart in secret, saying, "That is not the way, walk not in it." For, as surely as God has made you, that voice, if it come of your natural conscience, is a true reporter of His judgment; and as surely as God's HOLY SPIRIT has entered into you, to regenerate you, and make you a member of CHRIST, so surely is the same voice breathed from that HOLY SPIRIT, to keep you from vexing HIM, and forcing HIM to forsake you.

And be not afraid thus to call in God's HOLY SPIRIT (I do not say in words, but in the secret thoughts of your heart) on every occasion; slight though it seem to you, it is not slight,

if it prove the beginning of a sin. Since HE vouchsafes to be present with you in all things, in what seems little, as well as in what all men would call startling and awakening occasions, do you have so much reverence, as to try to remember HIM in all things. Be, what many will call, particular and scrupulous. Encourage all thoughts of caution and holy fear, though even to yourself they may seem, at first sight, to come unseasonably, and to be more than is required. For aught you know, they may be the whisperings of GOD'S most HOLY SPIRIT, coming just when you need them. Your peace, if not your salvation, may depend on your listening to them. You may find hereafter, that, in receiving them, you have been entertaining Angels unawares; and not only Angels, but the SON of GOD Himself. For such godly motions are His tokens; and if we love HIM so well, as to attend to them, and keep His words, HE hath said, "My FATHER will love him, and WE will come to him, and make Our abode with him."

## SERMON LXVIII.

USE TO BE MADE OF MISGIVINGS OF CONSCIENCE.

1 ST. JOHN iii. 20.

“ If our heart condemn us, GOD is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.”

GOD is present in the heart of man—the HOLY SPIRIT more especially in the heart of Christian, regenerate man; and therefore self-examination is not simply a useful exercise, but a mysterious rehearsing in secret of the awful judgment, which all will know of at the last day. Think of this, you that are inclined to quiet yourselves under the reproaches of your own conscience, with the thought that if you could know all, you would find many others as bad, perhaps among those whom the world least suspects: think of it, you who would fain persuade yourselves that all conscience is but a dream, because you see no two men's consciences exactly alike: think of it, again, you who are inclined to dismiss such thoughts for the present quite out of your minds, in the expectation, that if needed, (as something whispers you they are greatly needed,) they will come again at a more convenient season.

Recollect, one and all, that Holy Scripture plainly teaches, that GOD is in these thoughts, which you are tempted to deal so rudely with; and depend upon it, that as no word is void which goeth forth out of His mouth, so never does HE breathe a thought in any heart in vain. If we will not let it take root, and bear such fruits of holiness as HE delights in, yet it will not perish for ever; it will rise up against us in judgment one day, as things, which seemed quite

forgotten and gone by, sometimes come thronging into the mind; warnings neglected will return, but very likely too late to do good, and certainly not with so entire a blessing as if they had been attended to at once.

But what if any person say in his heart, "Thank God, mine is not such a case as that: I *do* vex myself when I have sinned: it is true, I break such and such a good rule continually, but I never do it without my conscience tormenting me afterwards?" This, I take it, is no uncommon case: we are too apt to do wrong, or leave undone what we know to be right, and feel a sort of disgust at ourselves afterwards for a while, and yet the next time the temptation comes, behave no better than before: and one reason of our so going on is, because we are aware, even while we sin, that we are, and shall be, as we have been, displeased with ourselves for our sin: and "surely," says our deceitful heart, "it is better to sin and reproach one's self, than to sin and be self-satisfied." And thus it too often happens, that the only fruit of the silent misgivings, which GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT puts into our hearts, is our fretting, for the time, and making ourselves sullen to others, and afterwards going on only the more stubbornly in our misbehaviour.

Something like this, if I mistake not, is shown to us by Holy Scripture in the case of Saul. Evidently his revenge against David was all the while, at least for a long time, accompanied with many misgivings. He vexed himself and others, he made himself miserable; but his spite and malice continued just the same.

Let us bethink ourselves of this danger; for indeed it is a sad reality, and nearer some of us than we think. Is it such a very uncommon thing, for people to be cross and unkind to whoever comes in their way, because their own consciences reprove them, and make them uncomfortable?

I wish we could recollect, when so tempted, from Whom the thoughts come which make us uneasy in our sins. Had Saul realized to himself the presence of the all-seeing God in his heart; had he said to himself, when David's truth and loyalty made him feel ashamed of his malicious purposes, "This cometh of the LORD of Hosts; HE is close to me, I will humble my heart before HIM:" surely he would have found grace and strength to resist the Evil Spirit: surely he would not have come to so bad an end.

Let us beware how we tread in the steps of King Saul: let us

well understand that our occasional fits of remorse, if we do not improve them into true repentance and amendment, are an invitation to the Evil Spirit to come in and make us sullen, moody, despairing. He knows, better than we do, that the first beginnings of remorse are from the HOLY ONE; that if we do not obey them, we grieve that Blessed SPIRIT and drive HIM, more or less, away from us: and he, the watchful power of mischief, depend on it, is near and prompt enough, to creep in and take that room in our hearts, which we will not allow the Divine Instructor and Peace-Maker.

Or you may consider the thing in this way. Look at the case of a froward child, knowing that it is in the wrong, and therefore altogether vexed and sullen, but not yet so subdued, as quietly to own the fault, and turn over a new leaf for the time to come. Who does not know that such a child is in the worst possible way, until that evil disposition is subdued? Then only apply the same rule when you are examining yourself. Do not begin to flatter and soothe yourself, in the hope that your sins are not so bad as some others, because you are really annoyed and vexed with yourself for them. Such annoyance, if it do not lead you to forsake them, makes your case rather worse, being, as it is, one more warning unimproved.

I will now go on to a different case. I will suppose a person, not so much flattering himself, by a silent comparison between his own self-reproach, and the reckless daring sin of some others, as giving way to a sort of despondency, because he has often tried to repent—at least he thinks he tried—and failed. I will imagine it the hundredth, nay the thousandth time that such and such a wicked enjoyment is before you, and you are on the point of giving way to it. Your conscience smites you and says, “Hold back:” and the Evil One puts it in your heart to say, “I have tried so often before, and could not refrain, or if I refrained for a time, I fell afterwards into the snare: and why should I think it will be any better with me now? It is no use—I will just give myself up.”

One longs, if it might be so, to find one's way to the heart and conscience of a person thus tempted, and say to him, Are you in earnest desponding? or is not your despondency just a word, by which you are permitting your enemy to impose upon

you? You cannot surely despond, for you know Whom you have to deal with. The habit of sin is mighty, it is true : the tendrils of it, as of some creeping poisonous shrub, have wound themselves not only round but into your heart, so that it seems as if it were a part of your being ; but remember, on the other side, the Hand which is laid upon you is also an Almighty one. " God is greater than your heart," and can overcome it, if you cry to HIM continually, and strive as in His sight, in spite of all coldness and irksomeness. " God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things ;" knoweth, better than yourself, not only the depth of the present mischief, but also what seeds of good are still within you, which His grace, would you surrender yourself to it, would surely find out and cherish, as the rain from Heaven finds out the living portions of the root of some plant, which seemed quite dead with the frost, and causes it again to bring forth and bud.

Do not despond, however often you have fallen ; set your face like a flint to abstain from the evil, to resist the bad habit, this one time at least. You will feel perhaps cold and cheerless when you have done so : never mind ; take it as part of your punishment ; do not set your heart on experiencing, here, that joy in God, which is the portion of the pure in heart, you who have so sadly swerved from that high calling. Think it a great thing to be addressed, as you now are by your conscience, or rather by God's SPIRIT, moving inwardly in your conscience, much in the same way which HE tried in the case of a decaying Church of old : " Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die : " think it, I say, a great and blessed thing, that God allows you, by even so much watchfulness, to keep and strengthen that little hold you have of HIM ; do not give up : do not say, It is no use.

If you were a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a rock, you would not say, the hold you had of the rock was of no use to you ; you would not let it go on purpose, because you had often slipped back before. No, you would cleave to the one remaining chance ; you would exert yourself, every limb, to climb a little higher ; you would know and feel that this one chance made all the difference to you, and that you could not be too thankful for it. When shall we learn something like this true sense of things, in matters which concern our everlasting life? When shall we begin to un-

derstand and lay it to heart, not merely to say over and over, that GOD is within us, that it is His Voice, which we hear inwardly checking us in our sins : and that where His Voice and Word is, there is HE ready and willing to save, even to the uttermost, those who have seemed to go nearest to throw themselves away ? When shall we understand that it never can be altogether in vain to obey the misgivings of conscience ? that it will by GOD's mercy lessen punishment, even though it come too late to ripen into perfect repentance ?

Wherefore, endeavouring by GOD's grace to guard ourselves against all these abuses of His mercy ; neither to be content with ourselves, because we are uncomfortable in our sins, nor to fall back in despair, because we have so often fallen back : let us, by the help of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, set ourselves these good rules, which will enable us to make the right use of His awful and glorious Presence in our very hearts.

First, let us make it a strict law to ourselves, to notice the misgivings of our conscience ; not to let them pass by as in a dream, as if they meant nothing, as if they were no more than the flashings which come before the eye, when we close it very hard, and try as it were to gaze on darkness. Yet even in such cases, the images which we see are real, they are the remembrance of things which have actually passed before our eyes ; and so when our own heart smites us, no doubt it is a true and real thing, a touch as it were from the hand of HIM, in whose hands we are, body and soul. Let us notice and attend to it accordingly, not in a kind of distempered passionate way, simply to torment ourselves with it, like dumb creatures when they are in pain, but like reasonable beings, who are able by such throbs of pain to guess what this sickness is, and what they must do to be healed.

And to this end it will do us good not only to notice the misgivings of our conscience at the time, but also to recall them, put them together, compare one day's report of them with another's ; just as physicians and nurses watch a disease ; and to make out as we may our chief dangers, and what GOD would have us to do. Thus, if your own heart reprove you at any time for being too soon angry, you will do well to remember it, not only for a little while after, but to recall it in your prayers at night, and again also the next morning : if the same thing happen the next day, then put both together, and try to have a double repentance, to



pray to ALMIGHTY GOD twice as earnestly, to watch yourself twice as attentively, to punish yourself twice as severely.

This, if any, one may believe, must be the way to make the devil leave off tempting you, when he finds that his very temptations only make you the more obedient Christian; more humble, more wary, more afraid of your favourite sin, more distrustful of yourself, more diligent in seeking God's grace, more regular in prayer and in receiving the Holy Communion. And we must needs imagine, great must be the peace, and blessed even on earth the condition, of that soul which the devil has left off tempting, because he found it resolute in keeping God's commandments. Is it not worth all the care, and pains, and self-denial, if we can bring ourselves at last to anything so happy as this?

And the ready way so to do is, to train ourselves regularly, as children are trained, when we want to teach them some hard lesson, or break them of some favourite ill custom. Must we not first watch them, and see what their weak points are, and bear those weak points in mind, and contrive perpetually guards and cautions against them? So must we do with ourselves: when our attention is called, by any pang of conscience, to some wrong disposition of our own, we must look to it, not once nor twice, but continually; we must make a rule of so doing, and then we must, from time to time, put together the several hints and notices concerning ourselves, which PROVIDENCE so gives us. And thus we shall come to know ourselves so well, as to be quite certain, and actually to feel in our hearts, that we cannot stand a moment without some far better strength than our own: which truth, as things now are, we are for ever acknowledging in words, but the more we talk of it, the less, too often, do some of us appear practically to bear it about with them.

For indeed this truth, the need of GOD'S continual help, is of all truths most certain to degenerate into mere words, unless it be really acted on; that is, unless those who acknowledge it really take care to behave as persons who hope GOD is with them, and would not for the world forfeit His aid. It follows, that in order to deal wisely with ourselves, and not to throw away God's gracious warnings, we must not only notice them at the time, and put them together, and use them as means to know ourselves by; but chiefly and above all, we must practically OBEY them:

doing things, and leaving them undone, as our conscience warns us at the time.

And let us use ourselves to take very slight warnings; for they are not the less real, they are not the less from God, because they touch us but softly and gently. It is not only the thunder which comes from Him, and the mighty rushing wind, but also the still small voice.

More particularly is it necessary for those who are beginning to repent, to force themselves to attend to the very faintest scruples which they really feel within them; for their hearts and minds are in some measure seared, by the evil or careless ways in which they have been living, and it may be that a great transgression, in their case, may awaken but a very slight feeling of remorse. They are like persons set to watch, who know that their hearing is imperfect, and who, therefore, ought the more wakefully to listen after the slightest sound. A man who has been used to take liberties with the property of others: his master's, his employer's, his neighbour's, or any one else; to take things without leave; to manage a bargain too much for his own advantage:—such persons as these, it is likely, will find their consciences but very slightly galled by any single act of that kind; but they ought to account it God's warning just the same; and if they humbly and steadily set themselves to obey it, and really turn from the sin once, there is good hope that the second time the hint from above may be more distinct, and their feeling of their duty keener; and the third time still more; and so in course of years, perhaps of months, God may give them such grace, as to feel a real horror and loathing of things, which at first they could hardly understand to be wrong.

It is just the same in leaving undone what the will of God is that we should do. In going to Church, for instance, who does not see how different one man's conscience is from another's? One man is vexed, and blames himself, if a single Sunday pass without his coming here; another is quite at his ease if he come when it is fine weather; one or two perhaps may be found so truly convinced of CHRIST's presence here, that they are more or less disquieted, if the bell ever call them to Church without their answering it: others, on the contrary, feel no particular remorse, though months and half-years pass away, and they continue

absent. Well, it is a sad thing that any should be so unfeeling as these last ; but at least, at whatsoever point they *do* begin to feel a little, let them pay regard to their own feelings. If the voice within do but slightly whisper on a Sunday morning, " You ought to go," do not let it pass ; do not turn away from it ; let no call of pleasure, however loud, drown that low but grave admonition : for depend upon it, it is from above, and no one can say what infinite consequences, whether for good or for evil, may arise from your obeying or stifling it.

And it is just the same with all other duties, which any one of us has hitherto unfortunately neglected. Let us be quite sure that on such things, when our own heart does begin to break silence, a very moderate condemnation from it may be taken as an earnest of a very severe one from GOD : and that the only chance we have of ever really conforming our wills to His in those matters, and so becoming fit for His everlasting mercy, is steadily obeying that first slight whisper, and the next to it, and the next ; till the stony heart by degrees be taken away, and HE have given us a heart of flesh.

Observe, I have been speaking throughout of those cases, in which our conscience calls to us, however gently, yet distinctly : cases in which we have no real doubt what the HOLY SPIRIT would have us do. There may be such a thing as a doubting conscience, when a person's mind misgives him, that on some accounts he is wrong, in doing or not doing so and so, yet he cannot quite settle the matter, putting it ever so fairly to himself. How are we to act in such a case ? Surely we must look and see on which side is most humility, most real self-denial : and if we take our part on that side, we can hardly be very wrong. Thus when there is authority on one side, the authority of the Church, or the king, or our parents, and only some fancy of our own on the other, there humility tells us plainly on which side she will be found. Again, if in all other respects a matter seem fairly balanced, between doing a thing and not doing it, it is a good rule of Christian discipline to take that side which is least pleasant to you : dealing rather rudely with your natural self, and bringing it by all means into subjection. It is safer and better on the whole to decline some enjoyments which might perhaps be taken innocently, than to venture too near those which, when they are

conceived, bring forth sin, and when they are finished bring forth death.

I have now mentioned some of the principal rules, by which Holy Scripture and the Church of God would teach a man to make the most of the witness of his own heart ; that is, of GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT there, condemning him. I will but add one remark, arising naturally out of the consideration of the inward warning voice, as the token and rehearsal of the great trumpet, which is soon to sound, and call us all to that judgment, which will at once be outward and inward, and the event of which will be for ever. I say then, it may be well to remember, that although *we* see our sins but one by one, GOD sees them all together in a body ; how they join to make a bad habit, and those bad habits again to make a bad character, and all the bad characters of all times and nations to make up the Devil's Kingdom, the mystery of iniquity, which the LORD will destroy with the brightness of His coming. Thus GOD sees our sins now ; and thus HE will show them, by and by, to the world and to ourselves ; unless we first apply the blood of CHRIST to them, by all the means of penitence and grace.

What St. James says so fearfully to certain proud covetous men, will be fulfilled quite as fearfully in all, who any how despise God's warnings within them : " Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days ; a treasure of unholy desires and evil deeds : and now, it will be heaped on you, and overwhelm you utterly." God grant us better things, things that accompany salvation ; through JESUS CHRIST.

# S E R M O N L X I X .

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CONSOLATIONS OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

*PREACHED ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.*

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I ST. JOHN iii. 21.

“ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward  
God.”

HAVING considered at large, in two former sermons, the case of people whose hearts condemn them, I wish now to consider what the blessed Apostle goes on to tell us of the contrary case; the case of people whose hearts approve and acquit them. His words seem to tell us, that here, as well as in the other case, what we perceive to be inwardly whispered is far more than a present touch of comfort or anguish, it is a true voice from Heaven, a faint token going before of what we may expect to hear openly at the last day. It is a mysterious pledge or token, a kind of sacrament of acquittal, as the other of condemnation; and both from God.

I will endeavour now to unfold this notion, and show more at large what I understand by it: and what Christian care is necessary, to guard us from the abuses to which it is plainly liable.

All of us, it is to be hoped, know something of the testimony of a good conscience; all have some faint notion at least, what joy it is, when a man's heart fairly tells him, “ You are on the whole doing your duty; you may reasonably hope that you are in

a good and right way." Why even in any small matter, merely concerning this world, we know what a difference it makes, when a man is quite sure he is in the right : when, as the common saying is, he can hold up his head, and look the other party in the face.

Why is this, but from an inward confidence, which all men feel, even the worst, in the strength of a good cause? They feel, in spite of themselves, that there is ONE above, in whose strength that which is good and right is stronger than that which is unfair and unjust.

We are all of us but too apt to make the most of this feeling, when we are engaged in disputes with others ; and to encourage ourselves in pride and inconsideration towards them. But surely we may, if we will, put it to a much better use. When we feel the sort of inward strength, which is given us by the consciousness that we are on the right side, in any small indifferent matter, surely we may be led to reflect upon the much greater strength and firmness of heart which it would give us, could we truly and honestly, on fair examination, feel that we are on God's side ; that we are on the whole, night and day, steadily endeavouring to do our duty and please HIM in all things, in thought, word, and deed, and so to make our calling and election sure.

If, when you are disputing about some insignificant bargain, you feel so much the more courageous, as you are more certain of being in the right ; think what would be the joy of heart, the rest and calm, the quietness and confidence, did a person's conscience tell him, that he had truly and really loved knowledge, and chosen the fear of the LORD all his days : could he humbly, yet reasonably, and really, take to himself the promises in the Book of Proverbs : " Whoso hearkeneth unto ME shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil. Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid : yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."

All which are summed up in that one gracious promise of our LORD : " Whosoever cometh to ME, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like : he is like unto a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the

foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock."

These are the words of our SAVIOUR and JUDGE; surely they speak of something real, not of a mere representation, of a state of things too happy for any one here on earth to obtain. Surely it were a great pity, were any Christian soul to imagine, that it is in vain for man to strive after this testimony of a good conscience, this acquittal of his own heart, because there are other texts, which speaking of such as never came to CHRIST, say that "every imagination of the thoughts of *their* heart is only evil continually;" that "*their* heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:" or again, because St. James says, "that in many things we offend all:" and St. Paul, "that his knowing no harm of himself in his office as a Christian minister did by no means justify him—he must wait for CHRIST's judgment." Undoubtedly these things are written in Scripture, and are to be considered by us: but they cannot be intended to do away with the effect of our LORD's plain words, assuring us, that doing His will, or not doing it, is that on which, to us His disciples, every thing entirely depends.

What use then, some one will say, are we to make of such texts as these, describing so earnestly the wickedness of the natural heart, and the weakness even of that which is regenerate?

Why, in the first place, they remind us, that whatever portion we have in the testimony of a good conscience, is not our own, but the gracious gift of HIM, who having united us to His SON by His HOLY SPIRIT, has thereby given us power to become like that SON, to do things which are really good and acceptable in His sight; to have holy desires, good counsels, and just works; to purify ourselves even as HE is pure.

In the next place, these texts teach us to be very much afraid of ourselves, as knowing that the seed of mischief, natural corruption, still remains in us, though united to CHRIST, and will spring up and bear fruit, if we be not careful to mortify it by strict obedience, and continual seeking for grace. In this manner we may bear in mind, and use to a godly and religious purpose, the sad truths, that we are naturally corrupt, and, even as Christians, full of infirmity. These things we may sadly remem-

ber, and yet not lose the comfortable hope of a good conscience and of joy in God, which our LORD Himself in so many places so graciously offers to us. Whatever fruit in holiness a Christian man has, he knows it is not his own; he knows it is and must be blemished with many infirmities. Yet since, being born again in baptism, he knows that he has come to CHRIST; if his conscience tell him that he has not wilfully gone on in disobedience to CHRIST, he may with trembling hope and fearful joy accept that comfortable witness, and use it as an encouragement to stand firm on the rock, whereon our SAVIOUR has set him.

In this way, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards GOD; a sort of freedom of speech towards HIM; the will, and the power too, to cast all our care upon HIM, and open to HIM all our hearts, not as servants merely to a master whom they respect, but as children to a most kind and condescending father. This would be the natural and ordinary fruit of Christian obedience, continued from baptism unto death.

And it has this great and peculiar blessing, that instead of decaying and wasting away, like mere feelings and impressions, as people grow older, it becomes the stronger, and is felt the more deeply, for every year of sincere and continued obedience. Of which St. Paul is a remarkable instance: concerning whom it has been well observed, how his manner of speaking of his own spiritual condition, on writing to Timothy his friend, close upon his death, differs from that which he adopted, years before, writing to the whole Church of the Corinthians. His earlier tone was—"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway:" and again, "I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified:" and again some years later, speaking to the Philippians, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of CHRIST JESUS. I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of my high calling in CHRIST JESUS."

Now listen to him a few years later still, when in prison, and aware that the crown of martyrdom was just about to descend upon his head. "I am now," he cries out to Timothy, "ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought



a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous JUDGE, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." And just at the end of the same letter, "The LORD shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom."

Thus, St. Paul's heart daily acquitting him, as he daily disciplined and examined it, his confidence towards God grew steadier and steadier, and he was enabled, not doubtingly, yet with deep humility, to rehearse to himself that comfortable sentence, which he, and all who resemble him, will hear from the JUDGE in the great day.

It is then possible for a Christian person, even from the day of his baptism, to walk stedfastly with his GOD and SAVIOUR. And it is no mere imagination, but a blessed reality, that when such a person's conscience tells him what his life has been, and bids him look forward with humble hope, that comfortable voice is, as it were, the echo, the repetition of the judgment, which the all-seeing GOD is at the same time passing in Heaven, on the same person's conduct. I wish this were more thought of than it is. I wish people could be brought to consider, that conscience is a sacred word, and is not to be used lightly, seeing that it means, in reality, GOD speaking in our hearts. I wish even serious and well-disposed people could be brought to think more deeply than they do, of the witness of their own heart in their favour; as being a token of the ALMIGHTY'S Presence, of their present communion with HIM, and of the infinite danger they will be in, if they now suffer themselves to relax their endeavours; if, instead of going on from good to better, they permit their enemy to take their crown; as, for instance, by becoming proud, or slothful, or by putting trust in themselves.

Or suppose we look at the thing in this way. You know our LORD has promised, that at the last day, all who have been trusted by HIM, and have duly improved their talents, shall hear the blessed and comfortable sentence, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy LORD:" and I should suppose there are few persons, at all used to read or hear the

Scriptures with attention, who have not before now felt their hearts in a manner thrill at the reading of that sentence, with earnest thought of the joy it will be, if ever, by God's infinite mercy through CHRIST, those words should be spoken to them. Now, what I want you to reflect upon is, that those very words of grace and acceptance are in a manner spoken to you by God ALMIGHTY, as often as your conscience, fairly and seriously consulted, tells you that you have really been leading your life, in some tolerable measure, by the rule of CHRIST's holy commandments : that you have kept yourself, by God's mercy, from every kind of wilful sin, and also wilful neglect of His known will.

Every such testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have tried to obey the Gospel of CHRIST, is an earnest of what you may hope for at the day of judgment : not a final earnest ; for you are yet in a world of trial, and it is but too possible for you to fall away ;—not a full assurance, for you are yet on earth, and full assurance belongs to Paradise : yet is an approving conscience, for the time, an earnest and token of that blessing, which our LORD shall pronounce from His throne of glory to all that love and fear HIM. One month of your life, spent so that your conscience is really void of offence towards God and towards man, will give you a glimpse of that last and infinite blessing ; one year will give you a better hope ; and every fresh year, month, week, and day, will, by God's mercy, add something to your comfortable and earnest expectation ; till a contented old age, following on a pure, and devout, and charitable life, dismiss the servant of CHRIST, ripe to his reward, as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

Such is the consolation of a good conscience, considered as an earnest of the sentence which our LORD will bless you with at the last day : and it is also no small encouragement, when we look at it as a token and sign of good men and good angels approving. Good angels, we have reason to believe, are never far off from us, as long as we are trying to serve God in earnest : and it is a real joy to one who remembers this, when he can hope that his conduct in secret has been such as they delight and rejoice in.

Again, since one man's heart is made to answer to that of another, and we are never quite happy without some sort of fellow-feeling on the part of our brethren ; I suppose one may reasonably

account it among the privileges of a good conscience, that we know we have on our side, in reality, though in secret, and perhaps without their being any of them aware of it, the whole body of the saints, living and dead: they are as a cloud of witnesses compassing us around; we are cheered, for example, with the thought, that if our parents or dear friends who are gone could know how we are going on, it would gladden them; we are inspirited, especially in those duties which few care for in our times, by the assurance that the holy men of old, if they could be aware of it, would say we were right. Thus a good conscience is an unspeakable comfort, as a token that we are not alone in the world; that we have what nature instinctively feels after, sympathy and the favour of all good spirits, as well as that of the ALMIGHTY CREATOR Himself.

But of all the privileges of a conscience thus void of offence, the one which I suppose would come most immediately home to any person, is that which St. John himself goes on to mention. After declaring, that "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God;" he adds, that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of HIM, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." That is, such a conscience warrants a person in a cheerful hope, that God will hear and grant his prayers, for our Saviour's sake, according to that promise by St. James, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." God will hear and grant his prayers, by giving him the very thing he asks for, or something better: as, on the other hand, HE denies the prayers of the wicked and double-minded, of those who pray one way and live another, even when HE seems to grant them.

Therefore the remembrance of a life well spent, and a heart carefully guarded and kept pure, is the greatest possible help in our devotions to God. Many of us unfortunately may but too well understand this, by our sad experience of the effect of impure, discontented, envious, or worldly thoughts. If ever any man have been used to give way to such thoughts, how sadly do they haunt him in his very prayers, and that for a long time after, though he try, never so sincerely, to repent in earnest, and rid himself of them.

From this even very imperfect and ordinary persons may a

little understand how blessed a thing it would be, to have one's memory stored with recollections of a different sort, with a treasure of pure and holy desires and deeds;—to be such as Abraham, whose long life of faith and resignation prepared him to stand in his old age before the LORD as a friend, and to offer up those earnest prayers for Sodom, which, though they could not save the place, yet saved Lot and his family, the only persons, as it should seem, who at all feared God in the place. Or such as Daniel, whose fasting, and faith, and prayer, was rewarded with that, which we do not read was ever given to any other saint;—a positive promise of salvation in the great day. Or such as the great and holy Apostle, who prayed that his thorn in the flesh might be taken away, and received in answer this greater blessing; that he learned of CHRIST Himself to rejoice in his infirmity, and was assured of the power of his LORD resting upon him.

Of such blessed returns of prayer, however far from our own experience, we may yet form some notion, by observing how much our own shameful recollections too evidently have to do with our own languid and seemingly fruitless prayers; even as our Church teaches in the Collect for this week; our devotions, like the rest of “the race which is set before us, are sore let and hindered by our manifold sins and wickedness.” It is sad and painful, but too true: God grant it may humble us in earnest; God grant, that though it be too late for our prayers to be the prayers of saints, they yet may be the prayers of penitents; that although we, wilfully as we have transgressed, too many of us, since our baptism, dare not hope by our prayers to remove mountains, to save the sick, to ask what we will and have it granted; we may yet so pray, and so live, as not to fail in the great point of all;—in this world, knowledge of God's truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

But as to those of whom St. John speaks in the text, who have either not so fallen, or whose repentance has come so quickly and so effectually after their fall, that the scar and wound of their conscience is well nigh worn out, by much grace and long perseverance: we have seen how much greater and better than a little present comfort the blessing is which they enjoy, in their hearts not condemning them. It is a signal of present favour

from GOD in Heaven ; an earnest of future acquittal from our LORD JESUS CHRIST ; a token that angels and saints, known and unknown, are on their side and in communion with them ; finally, a pledge that GOD'S ear is open to their prayers, and whatsoever they ask they shall receive of HIM.

Now the higher and holier thing a good conscience is, the more needful it is for us to be very careful, that we do not mistake our own case, and imagine we have that blessing, when in fact we have not. The more divine and perfect is "the peace of GOD which passeth all understanding," the more the pity and the loss, should it turn out at last, that any one of us has mistaken a false peace for that most heavenly gift. And certainly there must be no small danger of it ; else the Prophet would not so earnestly have warned GOD'S people, of some who speak peace when there is no peace : neither would our LORD so emphatically have warned us, of many who shall draw near to HIM, crying out, LORD, LORD, and fancying they have the peace of GOD, when yet they are such as HE never knew, and HE will bid them depart from HIM.

But there is no time now to speak in particular of any of these false kinds of peace. Only one general rule GOD has given, which will suffice for all who have in their minds anything like a true fear of HIM. "There is no peace, saith my GOD, unto the wicked." He that is wilfully breaking any of GOD'S holy commandments, may seem to be quiet both within and without, may have no vexing thoughts, may live and die undisturbed, may even feel sure of salvation ; but he has not the peace of GOD. CHRIST will not, when HE shows Himself to them, address them with that gracious salutation, which sealed His pardon to His true disciples, when they first saw HIM after HE was risen. "They were terrified and affrighted," but HE, the great High Priest, presently assured them of His perfect absolution ; saying unto them, once and again, "Peace be unto you."

And however HE may, for our manifold sins, leave us here in doubt and anguish, yet let us so truly repent, that it may please HIM in like manner to speak peace to us, when we too shall behold HIM in His glory. And let not that peace on earth, which was solemnly proclaimed to all at this blessed time, be forfeited by any one here, continuing in his sin after so many warnings.

# S E R M O N LXX.

PRIVILEGES OF MARTYRDOM.

*PREACHED ON ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.*

PSALM cxvi. 15.

“ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.”

LIFE is naturally the dearest thing we have ; as the Evil Spirit one day said of holy Job, “ Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life.” Therefore, even by the judgment of nature, they who part willingly with their lives, in a good and holy cause, are thought very much of : their death is precious in men’s sight. They seem to have done the very most they could do ; and there is a disposition in all men to honour and reward them accordingly ; if, indeed, any thing that our fellow-creatures can do for us after our death can be called a reward.

Hence the honours paid, in all ages and nations, to the memories and families of those, who have died fighting for their king and country. To all other merits they add this, that they show themselves brave, and above minding bodily pain and danger ; which is a kind of excellency that all persons, even the worst, can hardly choose but admire.

And thus it has come to pass that persons, of very bad and unchristian minds in other respects, have yet been unable to refrain from admiring the Martyrs of CHRIST ; those citizens of the holy city, and subjects of the heavenly kingdom, who have, at various times, laid down their lives for the honour of their Eternal King, CHRIST JESUS, and the enlargement of their better country, the Church.

Now, as all those feelings of ours, which are truly natural, have commonly some foundation of truth and right in them, so it is certain that this particular feeling, admiration for those who lay down their lives for CHRIST'S sake, is greatly encouraged and sanctioned from above. The Church of CHRIST, from the beginning, not without the secret teaching of CHRIST'S SPIRIT, ever paid especial honour to the Martyrs of CHRIST. They accounted martyrdom to be that baptism, of which our LORD and Saviour spoke, when HE said, HE had still "a baptism to be baptized with," besides that which HE had long ago received from St. John; and that HE was greatly "straitened," pressed in spirit, until that other baptism was accomplished. They thought HE was speaking of His own death; one may say, His own martyrdom, for HE died as a witness to the truth: they thought HE was speaking of it as of a baptism, not in water but in blood; and as such a baptism they ever esteemed the violent deaths of the holy martyrs and men of GOD, who, from time to time, laid down their lives, in those days of persecution, for the testimony of GOD and of JESUS CHRIST.

Concerning such, the sentence of the Church was, that, if they died without having yet received the outward and visible sign of Baptism, Water in the Name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST; yet they were undoubtedly partakers of the spiritual grace: their so laying down their lives for CHRIST would be to them a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness. In a word, the common sentence of the Church concerning them was such as the following, which I take from one of the greatest and most renowned Fathers: "Whosoever, not having received the laver of regeneration, dies for confessing JESUS CHRIST, it availeth them as much for the remission of sins, as if they were washed in the sacred fountain of Baptism." And our LORD Himself countenances this opinion, when HE says, "He that confesseth ME before men, him will I also confess before My FATHER which is in heaven."

Again, the Church was used, from very early times, to pay especial honour to the memories of the Martyrs, by visiting their tombs, and there building chapels, where they celebrated the holy feast of our SAVIOUR'S Body and Blood. Also they noted down, and diligently remembered, the days on which their lives were taken from them, as we should the day on which any dear friends

died. Only the Church called such days by the name of birthdays, reckoning martyrdom not a death, but a better birth, to a brighter and purer life; like baptism, as I just now said. For instance, they would call this day, St. Stephen's birthday; for was it not indeed birth to him, they thought, to be moved out of the darkness and helplessness of this present evil world into the light and joy of paradise? And in further token of honour, and of blissful communion, they used to recite the names of the Martyrs in the service of the sacrament of the LORD'S Supper, when they came to that part, where ALMIGHTY GOD is thanked "for those who have departed this life in His faith and fear."

Such was the honour in which the Church always held the noble army of Martyrs. And for doing so, there is much encouragement in Holy Scripture. St. Paul speaks of such death as a sacrifice; and declares the joy with which he looked forward to partaking of it, as though it were an offering which would surely be well-pleasing to GOD. "Though I be offered," says he, "though I be poured out as a drink-offering, on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation." He speaks as if, in some mysterious way, the blood of the Martyrs was mingled with that of our LORD, the only true atoning sacrifice, so as that they should have an especial interest in HIM.

And perhaps our blessed SAVIOUR Himself may seem to countenance this notion, when HE says that all the righteous blood slain from the beginning of the world, from Abel to Zacharias, from the first page of the Old Testament to the last, should be required of that generation which crucified HIM. Why so, except that the blood of the Martyrs was in a certain sense His blood, so that by murdering HIM they became guilty of it?

But of all the books of the New Testament, that which speaks most fully and expressly in praise of martyrdom is the last, the Book of Revelation; which may be considered as the words of our glorified LORD, approving or condemning things, as they now go on in His Church. In those visions, over and over again, we find our LORD and His angels giving all encouragement to those especially, who should in any age of the Church lay down their lives for His sake. "Be thou faithful," HE says, "unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

He unseals the Book of His Providence, and shows His servant



under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held. HE gives us a glimpse of those happy spirits, at rest and in safe keeping, with the hope of coming to perfection after no long time. "White robes were given unto every one of them, and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." Does it not sound, almost, as if the ALMIGHTY bore yet with the wicked world for the martyrs' sake, as if it were one great object of His government over us here to fulfil their number?

Again, in a certain vision of St. John's, an angel takes delight in pointing out to him, among the blessed saints in Heaven, those especially, who had come out of the great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the LAMB. Farther on, the whole choir of angels sing joyfully together in Heaven the praises of the martyrs, calling them their brethren, as having "overcome the Evil One by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, in that they loved not their lives unto the death." Once more: in the vision of CHRIST'S reign of a thousand years, St. John saw "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of JESUS and for the Word of God," living and reigning with their LORD; whereas "the rest of the dead lived not, until the thousand years were finished."

Now, inasmuch as St. Stephen, the saint of this day, was the first of that noble army, the first Christian who sealed his faith in CHRIST with his blood; (for St. John the Baptist, though a martyr, could not be reckoned a Christian martyr, since he suffered before the Kingdom of Heaven was set up;) one may naturally expect to find, in the account of St. Stephen's death, some tokens of this peculiar favour, which our LORD has ever shown to His Martyrs; and we shall not be disappointed. The last hours of this brave and holy man were indeed visited with blessings, such as angels might admire. As a kind of pledge and sign of the rest, it may seem as if his outward countenance was lit up with a holy brightness, not its own; like that of Moses when he came down from the mount: a brightness, which his very enemies took notice of. "All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." So St. Luke writes, in the manner of one who had been present, and saw what was going on. And as

he received many things from St. Paul, so he very likely received this; for St. Paul, we know, was then present: and one may well imagine how the remembrance of that angelic countenance may have abode with him afterwards, and encouraged him in counting his own life but loss, could he offer it for the sake of CHRIST.

In the next place, consider whether the LORD did not show Himself especially present with St. Stephen, by the power which he had, for a time, to keep silent those his outrageous adversaries, while, like his Divine Master, he taught them as one having authority. For I think it has been truly said, that St. Stephen's manner is more peremptory and judicial, more like that of our Blessed LORD in some of His most awful and threatening discourses, than the manner of any other Prophet of the New Testament. He seems, no more than the Jewish Prophets, to be speaking in His own person, but rather, throughout, to be merely uttering the message which God had put into his mouth.

And not only in this manner of his, but in many circumstances of his death, we may plainly discern such a resemblance of our SAVIOUR in His Passion, as could not but have been providential; and being so, cannot but be considered as a mark of especial honour from GOD ALMIGHTY. This resemblance may be seen in the form of his trial before the High Priest; in the charge brought against him, of speaking disrespectfully of the Temple; in his committing his soul to JESUS CHRIST, ("LORD JESUS, receive my spirit!") as HE had committed Himself to His FATHER with a verse out of the Psalms, "FATHER, into Thy hands I commend my spirit;" finally, in his kneeling down amid the showers of stones, and praying, "LORD, lay not this sin to their charge," just as his SAVIOUR, in the sharp agony of the Cross, had said, meekly, "FATHER, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But chiefly was the distinguishing favour of the FATHER and the SON shown unto him, in that, when the trying moment was just coming on, and the fierce persecutors had begun to gnash upon him with their teeth, he looked stedfastly up into heaven, and saw it opened, and beheld, through the opening, the glory of GOD, and JESUS standing on the right hand of GOD; not sitting, as the Creed represents Him: not as a King, judging, but as an Advocate, pleading; "standing" to succour this His servant in

his great extremity : and not him only, but in him all who should at any time suffer for the Name of their LORD.

That vision, at that moment, was the seal of CHRIST'S supporting Presence, which HE has thenceforth vouchsafed to His martyrs, in every age of His Church. As this day's Collect says, "They have stedfastly looked up to heaven, and have beheld, by faith, the glory which is to be revealed ; and that, as being full of the HOLY GHOST." The faith and patience of the martyrs are by special grace from that Blessed SPIRIT. HE opens their dying eyes to behold their SAVIOUR, and moves their failing voices to pray for their enemies. What surer token of the FATHER'S favour, what brighter earnest of life eternal, than the sight of our LORD, and the fulness of His HOLY SPIRIT ; both of which we see, are peculiarly the portion of martyrs ? "Precious" indeed "in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints."

And perhaps we should not be very wrong, if we added to these instances of especial favour, the effect which St. Stephen's death appears to have had on the young man, Saul, who was "standing by, and consenting to his death, and keeping the raiment of them that slew him." Not that the sight even of such a martyrdom had any power to convert Saul then ; we know who had reserved that work for HIMSELF, and by what an astonishing miracle HE brought it to pass : yet it plainly appears, that the recollection of St. Stephen's death, though it could not convert St. Paul, had no small virtue to encourage him, when converted ; to make him take pleasure in infirmities and persecutions ; to keep him humble ; to confirm him in self-denial. It was evidently a sting to his conscience, and a spur to his exertions ; by what we once find him confessing in words to our SAVIOUR : "When the blood of Thy martyr, Stephen, was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him."

One thing is here plainly taught us ; that we never must despair of the Church : never at all of the Church Catholic ; never of the Church in any particular country, as long as CHRIST shall crown it with suffering, especially with martyrdom, in His cause. It seemed, at the time, as if Stephen's death had done no good whatever to the young man, Saul ; as if it would only serve to increase his condemnation ; and yet, we see, it served to increase his glory. Nor will it be known, till the great day, how many more souls have been brought to their SAVIOUR in consequence of that

increased zeal in St. Paul, which may be put to St. Stephen's account. Again I say, dear and precious, "right dear in the sight of the LORD, is the death of His saints" that witness HIM.

But it is one thing to perceive this as a scriptural truth, and to admire it all as beautiful and noble, beyond all thought of man; and it is quite another thing to practise it; to carry it home into our own hearts and lives. The one comes of itself, the other is a great and rare grace.

And how is the thought, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the martyrdom of His saints"—how is this to be realized in our hearts and lives, and, in our quiet times, when no martyrdom is going on? Why, in this way: when we think steadily of martyrdom, we cannot but perceive how very unlike our natural view of what will make us happy is to the view of the saints of GOD; of those, who, being full of the HOLY GHOST, saw heaven opened, and who could not be mistaken as to the way of happiness. The very things we most shudder at; shame, pain, want, labour, most intense in their kinds, and the bitterest death; they willingly endured, nay, passionately longed after, for CHRIST's sake. Is it not rather alarming, to find our judgment and affections so very unlike theirs? Should we not do well to try and get a better mind; to form and cherish in ourselves, by the gracious aid of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, something like a spirit of martyrdom? It cannot be done all at once, but it may be done by degrees, if we will humbly and patiently try.

It may be done, if we will seriously set ourselves Christian rules of self-denial, and silently practise ourselves in them every day: if we make the mind and conduct of the holy martyrs our particular study, and endeavour to think deeply, and not just to feel warmly, upon them: if we seek the HOLY GHOST, of which they were full, in all those ways of the Church, which we know they delighted in: if we tame our stubborn wills in things which seem trifling, and lay ourselves out for others the more earnestly, by how much what we have to do may cost us more trouble, and seem to bring least reward in this present world.

This is that practice of the life of the Saints and Martyrs, which may best help us, by GOD's mercy, to practise their death also, should HE, by any turn of His providence, call us, unworthy as we are, to die for HIM.

# S E R M O N LXXI.

WISHING FOR CHRIST'S COMING.

*PREACHED ON ST. JOHN'S DAY.*

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REVELATION xxii. 20.

“ HE which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly : Amen. Even so, come, LORD JESUS.”

THE festival kept by the Church to-day, is that of the great Apostle and Evangelist whom CHRIST honoured with especial friendship; St. John. And the day offers a good opportunity for considering another great privilege with which GOD has enriched His true Church, over and above those, which have been noticed on former Saints' days; I mean her bearing continual testimony of the second coming of our LORD and SAVIOUR.

The spirit of prophecy poured out upon the Church, is a sure sign of her being GOD's own; for GOD only, as you well know, can enable frail and ignorant man to foretel things to come. He did so abundantly, by Daniel and Isaiah, and the other prophets of the Jewish Church; and when the time came to set up the Christian Church, then again the Spirit of Prophecy went abroad for her warning and comfort, as her Divine MASTER had promised. For just before HE departed from His disciples, HE assured them “ the SPIRIT of TRUTH would come, and guide them into all truth; and that HE would shew them things to come.”

This was fulfilled to many, if not all, the Apostles; but to none

more remarkably than to St. John, the favoured disciple whom JESUS loved. He, being banished to a lonely island, for the Word of GOD and the testimony of His truth, saw all those wonderful visions which are related in the Book of Revelation. Dark and difficult as most of that book is, thus much is plain to every reader: that it is in every part meant to glorify the SON of GOD. There is an eye, throughout, to the establishment of His glorious kingdom; and it ends, as you know, with His coming to judge the world, and to reward every man according to his works.

You see then that ALMIGHTY GOD, by giving to His Church the Revelation of St. John, has marked her to be His true Church, endowed with His prophetic SPIRIT according to his promise; and bearing witness, through all ages, to that which most concerns us to know,—His fixed purpose of coming again, to call us to that strict account, which will determine our lot for ever.

The very last words of this prophecy—almost the last words of the New Testament; the farewell words, as it were, of the HOLY SPIRIT, when HE had finished the Book of GOD—are these which I just now read in the text; “HE which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, LORD JESUS.” I say, these are, in a certain sense, the *farewell* words of the HOLY GHOST. Having taught St. John to utter them, HE sealed up the Divine Book, made an end of it, and left it with the Church, to see what use she would make of it. This makes the words doubly awful; but indeed, they are awful enough in themselves.

For what can be more awful, than to hear our LORD and SAVIOUR Himself speaking to us through His beloved apostle and prophet, for the very last time? And what is the message, which HE leaves sounding in our ears, would we but consent to open them and hearken unto HIM? It is this; “Surely I come quickly: it will be no long time before I am here again, and every eye, the most unwilling, shall see ME.” A fearful declaration indeed, to all those who have reason to think themselves enemies of CHRIST. But as to St. John, the friend of CHRIST, he receives it as the best news he could hear; he cannot refrain his earnest longings to have it so. “Amen, so be it,” he breaks out: “even so, come, LORD JESUS.”

Now, here are two things to be considered, most proper for

St. John's Day. First, In what sense could it be said that our LORD was coming "quickly," seeing that now a good deal more than seventeen hundred years have passed, and HE has not yet come again. Secondly, What sort of persons may reasonably join in the prayer of the beloved disciple, and express their delight in the certainty that the JUDGE of the world will soon be here.

Now, as to the first: the end of the world may be said to come quickly, in the sight of GOD, how many years soever may pass, before the actual day of judgment. For in the sight of GOD, as St. Peter tells us, "a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years." What are to us long distances of time, are absolutely nothing at all to HIM, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. HE knows what eternity is; to HIM, therefore, whatever takes place in time, whether sooner or later, appears close at hand.

It can never be so exactly with us; but in some very faint degree we may understand it, by considering how much shorter time seems to every one as he grows older. A week or a fortnight, to a boy of ten years old, seems a very long space of time: to a grown-up person it seems very little, and the longer he has lived, the less he thinks of it. And thus, when we come to the eternal world, and look back on our time here, it will appear as nothing in comparison, and men will stand amazed at their own folly, in having thought so very much of what they now see was to last but for a moment. Turn this seriously over in your mind, and you will in some sort understand how the whole duration of the world may be truly called very short, and CHRIST said to come quickly, though a thousand generations were to pass between St. John's prophecy and the end of the world.

Then, again, our LORD may be truly said to come quickly to each individual, because each individual will very soon die; and death, to him, will, after a sort, be the coming of his LORD. Death will turn him, helpless and alone, into the presence of the dreadful JUDGE. Death will settle his place for ever; will take away from him all power of repenting, or doing any thing which may change the place prepared for him at the great day. He never will be able to cross the gulf which separated the rich man from Abraham's bosom. Therefore, since you must die quickly, it may be truly affirmed that CHRIST will come to you quickly. The day of

judgment, if not in time, yet in thought, is the very next thing to the hour of death. For that very reason, above all others, death is so dreadful a thing to a sinner.

And yet there have always been some persons, who have rejoiced to think of the near approach of those great and awful things : persons, who, watching the signs of the times, and seeing all things draw to an end, have been able to enter into our LORD'S meaning, when HE bade them look up, and lift up their heads, because their redemption was drawing nigh. If you would know what sort of persons these were ; what sort of temper may lead a man, without irreverence or presumption, to rejoice in a thought so very awful ; they were such persons as the apostle St. John ; and their prevailing tempers and dispositions were such as his ; they were beloved and affectionate disciples of JESUS CHRIST.

Now when men are laid on the bed of sickness, especially if they have any great pain or sorrow of heart to endure, one shall often hear them wishing that GOD would take them ; that He would shorten their time, and remove them out of their misery, and the like. It would be well for such persons, if they would consider a little, what sort of people only have reason to make such a prayer, before they allow themselves to make it.

Those who are really like St. John, may perhaps, without presumption, pray and wish that GOD would take them : as St. John in the text wishes and prays, " Even so, come, LORD JESUS." The SON of Man, St. John's own personal friend, having appeared to him from the heavenly world, was now about to close His Revelation, and to withdraw from His Apostle's sight, to His glorious place at His FATHER'S right hand. What so natural, as that his favoured friend should earnestly long for his return, and express himself accordingly ? " Come, LORD JESUS."

But ordinary Christians, before they join in that prayer, especially if they are lying on a sick bed, or otherwise tempted to be fretful and impatient, should look to it, that they are endeavouring to resemble St. John in those parts of his character, which recommended him, as we may well believe, to our SAVIOUR'S especial friendship. Otherwise they may find too late, that they have been wishing evil to themselves in wishing the time of their probation shortened, and themselves hurried into



that world, where no repentance can be : according to the saying of the prophet Amos, " Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD ! to what end is it for you ? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light."

Now one great point in St. John's character, a thing which our LORD Himself pronounced to be worthy of an especial blessing, was this : that without seeing he believed ; that is, his mind was affectionate and teachable : not always restlessly seeking more and more light and knowledge, but rather bent, in the first place, upon practising to the best of his power what he already perceived to be right.

This disposition St. John showed, when going into the sepulchre of our LORD, on the morning of His rising from the dead, he saw the linen clothes lie, in which our SAVIOUR'S blessed body had been wrapped, and believed, at once, that He must be risen : whereas St. Peter and the other apostles kept perplexing themselves at His not appearing to them. St. John, I say, saw the grave-clothes and believed ; and thereby obtained a part in that blessing, which our LORD soon afterwards pronounced on all who should trust HIM with their salvation in earnest, though they might not be exactly the best able to answer those who gainsay and make objections : " Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The words of this blessing describe, if I mistake not, a very material part of St. John's character. He was inclined to believe without seeing : to lean on our LORD as a child leans on his parents, taking it for granted, that whatever they do is best, although as yet he cannot understand it, cannot perceive the reason of it. Endeavour in this respect to be converted, and to become as little children, and you have made a great step in imitating the beloved Disciple.

But, if you have such a disposition, however much you may long to see your MASTER, you will not, on account of your own pain or vexation, pray to have your life shortened, or wish, in fretfulness, that God would release you. You will rather leave it in His hands, who cannot fail to do the best, for those who resemble the disciple whom HE loved.

Another point in St. John's character was, his courageous, adventurous disposition, in his Holy MASTER'S service. It appears by the Gospels, that when the companions of our LORD and SAVIOUR all forsook HIM and fled, on the night HE was betrayed, St. John

was the first to recover himself: to follow HIM even to the palace of the High Priest, to stand by HIM even, and own HIM for his MASTER, in His bitter sufferings on the cross. For by the cross of JESUS were standing His mother, and the disciple whom HE loved; and HE said to the one, "Behold thy mother," and to the other, "Behold thy son." Such was St. John's great and signal reward, for his faithful affection, in keeping close to His MASTER through the worst. His MASTER trusted him with the care of His blessed Mother.

And it may be observed, that although St. John's own Gospel gives us the account of these things, he relates them without any kind of boasting, for he does not even mention his own name, but simply calls himself "the other disciple, whom JESUS loved" especially, as HE loved St. Peter. Here is a beautiful example for Christian penitents and sick persons. They may see by St. John's modesty, that praising yourself, reckoning up your own good deeds, contriving to have other people praise you, is not the way to please our LORD best. They who do so are not the persons to pray earnestly, "Come, LORD JESUS."

With this amiable modesty, as far as regarded himself, St. John united a great charity in his manner of speaking of other persons: particularly of St. Peter, for whom, as was natural, he seems to have had an especial affection. For instance, you may observe, if you read attentively, that St. John, in his account of St. Peter's denying CHRIST, carefully mentions all those things, which tend in some sort to excuse him, and show how sorely he was tempted: as, that the servant, who attacked him for being with our LORD, was a kinsman of the very man whose ear Peter had cut off; and some other such circumstances. And again, he mentions very particularly some things which happened after the resurrection, by which St. Peter showed his affectionate eagerness, and his desire, if he could, to make up for his fault. So that, as we read, we hardly know which we ought to admire most, St. Peter for his anxious and earnest repentance, or St. John for his kind and brotherly way of relating it.

But, still, in praising this great apostle, we must begin and end with what he was to our SAVIOUR; His friend: particularly attached to HIM, as a man to a friend in whom he delights. And

this, no doubt, was one reason why our LORD, on whom no instance of true affection is ever lost, chose St. John to be His friend. He knew beforehand how affectionately St. John would serve Him. Accordingly, as our LORD's friend, he, above all the rest, took care to treasure up His last words: that heavenly discourse, on the night before His crucifixion, in which HE bade His disciples farewell, and promised them and us a DIVINE COMFORTER.

Again, after our LORD was gone, St. John, perhaps more than any other of the apostles, showed his zeal against profane persons who were creeping into the Church, and corrupting her by false doctrine. He could not endure any such: his whole Gospel and his three Epistles were all written to warn men against them: which shows what a mistake it is to think, that speaking strongly of corrupters of the faith, and warning GOD's people of them sharply, is at all contrary to Christian love and charity. Whereas in the whole Book of GOD there are no sharper and stronger warnings, no severer sentences about false prophets, than are to be found in the writings of him, who was the very apostle of love and charity. The preacher who taught us that GOD is love; the disciple whom JESUS loved:—he has taught us, that if any man come as a teacher of religion, and bring not the true doctrine, as taught in the Church, concerning CHRIST come in the flesh, we are not to receive him into our houses, neither to bid him GOD speed.

In this Christian care, then, as in all other parts of loyal affection, let us endeavour, by GOD's grace, to follow the holy and beloved Disciple, and we shall be beloved as he was; and as we draw nearer our latter end, we may without presumption cry out as he did, when we read of CHRIST's near approach, "Even so, come, LORD JESUS."

## SERMON LXXII.

THE SPIRIT OF THIS WORLD EXEMPLIFIED IN HEROD.

*PREACHED ON INNOCENTS' DAY.*

MATTHEW ii. 16.

“—Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem”

Most of the histories, contained in God's Holy Book, are so framed, as to mix warning with encouragement in the instruction they give us. They are pictures of just such a world as we live in : neither entirely and hopelessly bad, nor yet ever very good. And this is just what we might make, if we would, most useful to ourselves. For thus we are shown, that no bad times can excuse us for want of goodness : it being plain from the Bible, that there have always been some good persons left, even in the worst of times. And on the other hand it thus appears, that no times, however good, no circumstances, however favourable, can put us out of danger : there having always been too many, who have contrived to fall away from God, when HE had done most to keep them to Himself.

It is so in the history of the martyrdom of the Innocents, in remembrance of which the Church has ordained this day to be kept holy. It is half encouragement, and half warning.

For what can be more gracious encouragement, to those who have but scanty outward opportunities of acquainting themselves with God, than the seasonable assistance which HE gave to those wise men, whose coming to worship CHRIST gave occasion to

these things? They came from the east, a long journey, because they wished to do God's will, and pay honour to His SON. And when the star, which at first guided them, vanished out of their sight, they did not, for discouragement, leave off their good work, but made inquiry at Jerusalem, the likeliest place to find out, "where HE was that was born King of the Jews." And having thus made it out, that HE was somewhere in Bethlehem, they were not left to themselves to make out the house where HE was, but the very star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. As much as to tell all the world, that God will never be wanting to those who sincerely take pains to do His will, how far soever HE may seem to have placed them from the ordinary ways of knowing HIM, the ordinary opportunities of devotion.

Another instance of God's kindness to the wise men was this, that HE warned them in a dream not to tell CHRIST'S enemy where to find HIM: which otherwise, in the simplicity of their hearts, they were going to do. No doubt, God could have delivered His SON, even if they had done as Herod bade them, and brought him word where he might find HIM, to put HIM to death. But it would have been a grief to these good men to have brought the holy Child into danger, even thus ignorantly: and this sorrow God graciously spared them. Not to mention, that very possibly their own lives might be saved by their not returning to Herod. For it would have been part of his hateful worldly wisdom, to destroy the witnesses of CHRIST if he could, as well as CHRIST Himself.

Another great matter of encouragement, to any one who reads this history with a good mind, is the consideration of God's dealings with the Holy Innocents themselves.

It is true they were cut off by the sword even in their mothers' arms, before they could know good from evil. Their death was, in a worldly sense, most untimely: but in a better and heavenly sense, it was blessed indeed, and took place in the happiest time. It was just what, if they could have chosen, we may be sure they would have fixed on for themselves. There is no other way that we can think of, in which little babes like these could so abundantly glorify God, as by dying (though they knew it not) in the place of His SON, that SON who after a few years was to die in their

place, and so purchase, as it were, their lives, and all that they had, to be His own property for ever. Even if we judged after the manner of men, we should account them happy, who were thus taken away in peace from the evil so soon to come upon their nation, the great temptation and danger of rejecting JESUS CHRIST. Nor has the Church ever made any question of their being brought, for His sake, to everlasting rest in Heaven: having been taught by St. Matthew to apply to them the words of the Prophet, comforting their afflicted mothers: "There is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border."

These are the comfortable parts of the history of the martyrdom of these holy and innocent babes. But we are not to forget, that it contains warning as well as comfort. There never was a more awful warning, than what is set forth, to every one calling himself a Christian, in the conduct of king Herod in this matter.

We are apt indeed to think of Herod, as of Judas, or of the other murderers of our Blessed LORD, as though theirs was a sort of wickedness quite out of the common; quite beyond any that can be committed by ourselves, or in our Christian times. But it is no more true to suppose this, than it would be to imagine the *good* parts of Scripture history—the character, for instance, of JESUS CHRIST Himself—beyond the reach of our imitation.

Let us consider Herod's doings, as they are related in this chapter, in their order, and we shall find them but too like a great deal of what we daily see and experience: too like the general conduct of every obstinate, worldly-minded man.

To judge fairly of this, we must put ourselves in Herod's place, and look at all his doings as he might have done at the time. He did not know, when he was first troubled at the news of CHRIST's birth, that this trouble of his would end in the murder of so many innocent babes. But we know it, as we read his history, and hate him beforehand for it. This hinders us from seeing the likeness between him and ourselves. But let us, in reading such histories as this, keep this thought always in mind: that if we give way to such passions, such envy and malice, as Herod's, it is not our own goodness, but God's Providence, which keeps us from being just as cruel and outrageous as he.

For if you only consider the first beginning of this great wick-

edness, you would not by any means be prepared for the end of it, any more than for the end of those sins of your own, which to you appeared little at the time you committed them. “When he heard of CHRIST’s being born to be King of the Jews, he was troubled.” Instead of rejoicing with the angels, humbling himself with the shepherds, and praising God with both, he was troubled with fear, and wished it had not been so. This, you will say, was bad enough: to grieve instead of giving thanks for the salvation of the world. But you may consider, that Herod did not look on the birth of JESUS as the salvation of the world. He only thought of what his own power and dignity would lose, by the birth of one who would set up, as he supposed, to be King of the Jews in his place. His share in this world, he thought, was going from him: and no wonder that he, having his heart set upon no better world, should be troubled and vexed in spirit.

Now, we all of us profess, of course, to be glad when CHRIST is born; and to give thanks with all our hearts, for the good news of the salvation of the world. We should be very much shocked at any one, whom we saw troubled and sorry for this, God’s greatest mercy. But how is it with us, when we come to find, as we must if ever we understand the Gospel aright, that this most blessed coming is to take away any of our portion in this present world—our ease, our pleasure, or our money? The common case, I apprehend, is something like what follows:—

We are not altogether ill-intentioned, when first we begin thinking for ourselves. We would fain serve God, but then we do not like parting altogether with the world: and we fancy it much more possible than it is, to join both services together. When, therefore, we come after a time to understand the Gospel of God, and the course of His Providence, better: when we find that our selfish expectations here, and our reasonable hopes hereafter, cannot both stand together; that pleasures must be abstained from, profit given up, disappointments and losses endured for God’s sake: we are greatly tempted to be troubled, and wish it otherwise: and every thing depends on our giving way to the temptation or no. If we once do so; if we allow ourselves to dispute God’s will, and to keep our hold of what displeases Him, for this world’s sake; we are beginning to give way to Herod’s

sin ; we are then troubled at hearing that CHRIST is born ; that GOD has interfered, to hinder our taking as much as we please of the delights and vanities of the world.

We have also an encouragement in this disobedience of heart, too like what Herod met with. For we read, that not only he was troubled at the news of Christ's birth, but likewise all Jerusalem—all those who ought to be the people of GOD,—were troubled and amazed with him. So it is in the concern which worldly and careless spirits feel, on finding out how much self-denial the Gospel requires of them. They are kept in countenance by their neighbours, who generally show too plainly, both by words and deeds, how much they dislike the doctrine of the cross, how strange it sounds to them, to be told they must not please themselves. And this is true, not only of the heathen who know not GOD, but also of the Christian world, such as we see and experience it to be. There is no sort of foolish pleasure, no sort of worldly-mindedness, which cannot find enough there to encourage and keep it in countenance.

Supposing, for instance, that any young man or woman chooses to spend all their time in mere diversions ; this is as sinful a thing, as contrary to the true love of GOD, as can well be imagined : yet, if it be spoken strongly against, to any particular person, there are so many who he knows must needs be troubled or offended with him, that he will care very little for what you can say. He will answer, "It must be uncharitable to speak so harshly, of what so many good-natured and creditable persons constantly practise." And thus, if the conscience be a little troubled at first, it is too soon silenced by the consideration that "all Jerusalem," the whole Church of GOD, must needs be "troubled with it."

It is the same with tradesmen about their little unfair gains. Every one in their business, they say, does the same : and why should they set up to be more liberal, or honester than their decent neighbours ?

Thus you see how many Christians ignorantly liken themselves to Herod ; first, in being troubled at finding how strict an obedience the Gospel of CHRIST requires of them ; and then in comforting themselves with the thought, that all their neighbours have as much reason to be troubled as they.



The next thing this wicked king does, is to put on a show of love for our SAVIOUR: "Go," says he, "and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found HIM, bring me word again, that I may come and worship HIM also." This Herod did, in order to make as sure as he could of murdering the innocent Babe, of whom he was suddenly become so jealous. Just so the worst enemies of JESUS CHRIST—those who crucify HIM afresh by their sins—do very seldom declare openly, that they have any sort of dislike of HIM. They are baptized themselves, have their children baptized, many come to Church, many to the holy communion, and some read their Bibles diligently;—but it is much in the same spirit in which Herod conducted this search of his. He sought the young Child to destroy HIM: and sinners too often study the will of CHRIST in the Scriptures, with no other purpose than to make it void, if they can, by finding in it excuses for their sins.

As, for example, because St. Paul has said, "If any man provide not for his own household, he is worse than an unbeliever;" many a worldly-minded man has pleaded this before now as a reason, why he ought to lay up money for his children, instead of giving to those who are in need. Whereas, in fact, the Apostle had no such meaning: his purpose being to reprove such as hoarded up their money, or spent it all on themselves, instead of giving it to their nearest relations who stood in need of it.

This I have mentioned as an instance of the manner in which people pretending great love to Holy Scripture, destroy its true meaning altogether, because they will not part with some favourite passion or custom which it condemns. And in this way, when they least think of it, half the world are Herods in heart.

But when the case becomes too clear to them, as it must soon do, if they are sensible men; and they see plainly how impossible it is to keep the world and their innocency both; then it is that they are tempted to throw off the mask, to declare themselves as open enemies to Christianity as Herod to CHRIST, when in his fury he commanded all the children in Bethlehem to be destroyed, rather than leave a chance of missing the HOLY CHILD.

Though of a cruel and bloody disposition, it is likely this was far indeed from his thoughts, when he first set about persecuting our LORD. So it is with those Herods among us

Christians, when they have once begun to deal deceitfully with God's word. One sin, and one excuse, draws on another, till at last they are entangled in such crooked ways, that they know not how to go back. Let Herod once be troubled at the birth of CHRIST, and he will soon be guilty of falsehood, malice, and murder. Let a Christian once allow himself to find CHRIST's commandments too strict for him, and there is no knowing how soon he may be a confirmed unbeliever, or a profane scoffer at religion. What murderer ever, on beginning his evil courses, supposed that they would end in murder? Yet, through the whole of such an one's conduct, each thing generally follows so close upon what went before, that it seems to him as if he could not help it. The only way to be safe from the very worst crimes, is to stop at the first beginnings of crime altogether—to make up your mind, that nothing can by any means be a sufficient reason for doing wrong.

Last of all, you may observe, concerning Herod, that this most outrageous crime did him no good whatever. By God's wise and good Providence, His SON was delivered, being removed into Egypt before the murderers got to Bethlehem. And the murder itself served to accomplish a very remarkable prophecy of Jeremiah; and so to bear witness (very contrary to the murderer's intention) to the kingdom and person of our LORD.

As the likeness holds, in other respects, between King Herod and such as dislike the Gospel among ourselves, so, we may be sure, it is always found to answer in this particular. Do what they will against the truth, they are certain to recommend and forward it to the end. They bear witness to it in spite of themselves, by living such lives as God foretold His enemies should, and finally coming to such miserable ends as HE threatened them with.

Not that this always appears immediately, any more than King Herod and his counsellors knew immediately that their wicked and violent purpose had failed, and that the SON of GOD was safe in Egypt, out of their reach. God keeps His judgments, for a while, out of sight, to try us more thoroughly. But, from what little is in sight, we are quite certain, that the more we know of them, the more reason we should find to agree in the wise man's conclusion: "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his

days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God."

It appears, from what has been said, that if we would escape this bitter disappointment, and the sin and condemnation of Herod, our great rule must be this:—Not to suffer that trouble to get the better of us, which we naturally feel, when we find the Gospel requires self-denial. Let us remember the young man in the Gospel, who, being warned, for the first time, that, if he would obtain eternal life, he must forsake all that he had, and follow CHRIST, was sad at that saying, and went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. You see, his overcoming that trouble, which would cause itself to be felt when the cross was so suddenly laid upon him, would have made all the difference to him. For aught we know, it might be as much as his happiness was worth.

Christians, when any thing troubles them in the Holy Commandments of their God, should use themselves steadily to consider, that, nevertheless, they *are* God's; and that to shrink from them, as too strict, is direct rebellion; the grossest affront to HIM, who made us what we are, and loves us too well to bid us do any thing, but what is really good and necessary for us.

Again; once use yourself to endeavour at escaping God's law, and there is no end to the sin and misery, into which you will plunge yourself. You will be led on, farther and farther, from your home, till you know not where you are, and it is too late to turn back. How much, how sincerely, will you then wish that you had never strayed from home! that you had prayed to the ALMIGHTY in good time, and obtained His grace to do always, without hesitation, what you certainly knew to be right!

Even if one set religion aside, to expect one's own way in all things is one of the most absurd and inexcusable of all human errors. No little plan of business, or even of pleasure, can ever be accomplished without self-denial. It is senseless and unthinking, to the last degree, to expect the great end of life more cheaply than these lesser every-day enjoyments. Let us gladly, therefore, make up our minds to deny ourselves in all things, rather than deny CHRIST.

Consider, lastly, that when you once begin to think good

advice scrupulous, and the commandments too severe, you cannot then pretend ignorance of their strict meaning. You are, by your own account, awakened; you are not one of those who follow their passions quite blindly. So much the worse for you, then, if, knowing your duty, you are not most careful to do it.

END OF VOL. II.







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